YOUNG MAIDS AND OLD

CLARA LOUISE BURNHAM

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By Clara Louise Burnham

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A WEST POINT WOOING, and Other Stories.

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
BOSTON AND NEW YORK

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BY

CLARA LOUISE BURNHAM

AUTHOR OF "NEXT DOOR," "NO GENTLEMEN," ETC.



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Young Maids and Old.

CHAPTER I.

AT THE EYRIE.

THE little New England town of Proctor was finally becoming popular. Possibly the fact of Miss Trowbridge's having built her fine gray stone residence on the high bluff overlooking the lake, may have called the attention of some Bostonians to the truth that Proctor was sufficiently near the city to make it a desirable site for a summer cottage to which the weary city man might retreat when the warm season came on, and where he might still continue to be within call if the exigencies of business summoned him.

As for Miss Trowbridge, she had been born and bred in Proctor, and when the fancy seized her to build a modern house she felt no desire to go elsewhere, but chose the high, inconvenient spot of ground in her native village, which from childhood had possessed a fascination for her.

Not every one envied her her castle in the air, where mourning winds sighed among the pines in the spring and autumn, and wintry blasts had full sweep in their season; but no one could deny that The Eyrie — for so the house was called — afforded a veritable retreat in the long summer days, for there, uplifted on its green hill sprinkled with gray rocks, shade and breeze were never denied.

Miss Trowbridge herself was a maiden of a certain age and an uncertain fortune. She rather ostentatiously announced to every friend and acquaintance the fact that she had completed half a century of life, but as to the amount of her fortune, the figures were known only to her lawyer and to herself. That she was rich no one doubted, and neither was there any doubt as to her intentions regarding an heir to her wealth.

Leo Graham was her orphan nephew, and had been the object of her tender care since he was left, a year-old baby, to her charge. She loved him with an absorbing love which made her blind to the fact that her little world might not to an individual see her idol with her adoring perception. Consequently she bored her friends about him to an extent which would have made him hateful in the eyes of local society had he been other than the unostentatious young fel-

low that he was, brimming over with irresistible good nature, and with an ability to "drive dull care away," which, besides being a continuous refreshment to his friends, stood him in good stead in connection with his aunt's overweening fondness. Few youths could endure the solicitous espionage which, in Miss Trowbridge's case, would fain share her nephew's very thoughts, and which openly noted his every act and word from boyhood to manhood with jealous eyes and ears; yet Leo bore it all with sunny good temper, unconscious of annoyance, unstung by the frequent absurdities of which Aunt Emma was guilty, while he made and retained the friendship of those with whom he came in contact.

The year-old baby Leo had caught his aunt's heart on the rebound. She was a young woman with large prospects at the time of Leo's birth, and handsome Richard Flanders had swallowed his repugnance to her plain face and awkward person, and offered her his hand, which she had accepted with intense joy.

The engagement was a stormy one, with love on her side and restlessness on his, and he finally made her reproaches the occasion to break it. With his departure all consideration of her own possible marriage dropped out of Emma Trowbridge's life, and a month afterward, her widowed sister dying, the little

baby put his soft arms around her neck and crept into her heart to fill it full so long as they both should live.

She never forgot Richard Flanders; though she heard of his marriage without a pang, so absorbed was she just at that time in watching Leo's first attempts at walking alone. She never met Mrs. Flanders, but when the latter died, Emma was told of it, and she knew that Richard had been left with a little girl, Irene, whom he placed at a boarding-school.

"Poor motherless child!" murmured Miss Trowbridge when she heard of it; but Leo had to speak a piece in school that day, and the excitement of the occasion obliterated the little Irene's claims to sympathy.

On the morning on which this story opens, Miss Trowbridge was herself an object of sympathy. She was sitting in a room darkened to a twilight soothing to her red and swollen eyes. She had wept until the fountain of her tears was dry, and now lay half reclining on a sofa, her head thrown back among pillows, her saturated handkerchief in her hand, a picture of woeful exhaustion.

"What a hard, hard world it is!" she thought.

"I've no doubt it is full of people as unhappy as I am."

Being in a pessimistic frame of mind, her thought reverted to a conversation she had had the day before with a lady visitor, who had brought up the subject of Richard Flanders again. The lady's husband was one of a company who were about sending Flanders abroad on their business matters, and the topic of the brief conversation had been the girl Irene, whom Flanders was to leave behind him when he went.

"The poor child is but a little while out of school," the visitor had said. "I should think she must lead a lonely life."

Miss Trowbridge had replied rather vacantly, being absorbed in her own coming trial of parting with Leo. But now the parting was accomplished. Leo had gone. The world was dark, empty. It seemed natural to let her thoughts rest a moment on Irene Flanders and her probable position.

"In a boarding-house, perhaps," thought Miss Trowbridge, with commiseration. "That selfish father of hers wouldn't care, I suppose. It is equally probable, though, that she has plenty of friends. I'm sure I have no need to pity any one else to-day;" and she groped about the sofa for a fresh handkerchief as her tears rose anew.

A knock sounded faintly at the door, and a maid appeared with a properly downcast face.

"Miss Trowbridge, Miss Thorne wants to see you. I told her I didn't think you'd be able."

Miss Trowbridge dried her eyes. She had grown weary of solitude in the last hour, and craved sympathetic companionship.

"Certainly I will see her," she said. "Show her up here."

In another minute Miss Thorne came in. She was also a maiden past middle life, a plump little person, the lines in whose forehead the most casual observer might see were but temporary.

"You poor, poor dear!" she said, bustling up to the sofa and kissing its occupant. "I feel wicked to intrude upon you to-day, but I felt I must see you."

The mourner stretched out one hand, and with the other pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Now you've cried enough, I'm sure, if he's been gone an hour," continued Miss Thorne, soothingly.

Miss Trowbridge removed the handkerchief and looked at the clock. "An hour and seventeen minutes," she said brokenly. "How many times does an hour and seventeen minutes go into three months? It will be the first time I ever went two weeks without a glimpse of him. While he was at Harvard I

never missed seeing him once a week, and after he graduated, during the two years we were travelling, I never lost him from my sight more than a few hours at a time. I did want to go with him this time, — oh, how I wanted to! but he said, 'Aunt Emma, how could you go with Layton and me on that kind of a trip, walking, walking, everywhere, up mountain and down dale!' At first I thought I might manage with donkeys, but at last I had to give it up. Why couldn't that miserable Layton go alone? It would serve him right if he should be ill and unable to go at all."

"Hush, hush!" said Polly Thorne. "No one knows how much harm is done by that sort of wishing. Do wipe your eyes like a dear creature, for I want to tell you some trouble of my own when you can listen."

"I said the world was full of trouble, and it is, and we poor women have to bear it all," groaned Miss Trowbridge, sitting up with an heroic effort.

"You see, Phineas will be sure to leave it to me," Miss Thorne hastened on, with unconscious irrelevance, her brow growing more contracted as she again took up her own train of thought. "I've received a letter to-day," she explained, "from an old friend of mine, asking considerable of a favor of me, and I want to know what you would advise me. I've had two

letters from her, the first merely friendly, saying she'd been married twice, had a little girl by her first husband, and so on, and now I see that was just preparing the way for the one that's come to-day, giving her reasons why she wants me to take this child of hers and keep her while she goes abroad with her husband, who is out of health. Now would you take the responsibility of any one else's child?"

Miss Trowbridge's hands were lying limply in her lap, and her eyes listlessly rested on her visitor's troubled face.

"Well, that's quite a question for you, Polly," she said. "You and Phineas are so set in your ways, it would be a great change for you. Still, it might not be an unpleasant one."

"Well, it seemed to me I must tell somebody and talk it over," said Polly, dubiously. "It's such a queer letter; praising the child's beauty and asking if she might bring her playthings, just as though that wouldn't be a matter of course if she came."

"I almost wish I had been the one who had received such a request," said Miss Trowbridge. "How empty, empty this house will seem now, with only poor lone me in it!"

Miss Thorne sighed and shook her head. "There is too much here that a child could destroy. In my

cosey little nest she can't ruin anything more than Phineas' and my peace and comfort. I shall just make him decide it, that's all," she added, decidedly.

"Then the girl will come," returned Miss Trowbridge. "Phineas' big heart is always ready to embrace all humanity, and he will not grudge house-room to one child. You needn't hope it."

Miss Thorne colored with pleasure, as she always did at praise of her brother, but she shook her head with an assumption of vexation.

"Phineas *hasn't* a bit of sense," she said.

"I hoped I was going to see so much of you this summer," said the other, plaintively; "but if this plan is carried out you will be absorbed. You see I can't advise you, Polly, after all. I am too much interested."

"But you are accustomed to the care of a child and I am not, and my principal motive in coming was to ask you to stand by me, if we decide to let her come, in case she has whooping-cough, or measles, or anything. The idea simply overpowers me."

Miss Trowbridge looked more animated at this deference to her experience, and readily promised her aid in case of emergency. After her visitor had gone she fell again into revery, now slightly tinged with envy of Polly Thorne's prospect of a child's com-

panionship. She looked about the room in which she sat, rose, and went to a window and looked down the precipitous decline, below which gleamed the waters of the lake, blue as the sky above. It was high noon on a glorious June day, and all nature shone with a generous gladness, but Miss Trowbridge looked listlessly upon the lovely view. It had lost its living, moving attraction for her.

"If I only had some interest, some one to talk to, some one with whom to sit at table for the next few months!" she thought.

She ran over in her mind her list of acquaintances. She had always been shy of young women. In her eyes, each and every girl in Proctor either was already the victim of Leo's charms, or would become so if the slightest opportunity were given her. So Miss Trowbridge had, as it were, kept one eye on her nephew, and one on the young feminine population of the village where he had grown up, and she was partly conscious of the unpopularity she had caused herself. She could not, as she reflected, think of one girl who would be likely to accept an invitation to visit her under the safe conditions of Leo's absence.

In the midst of her depression back came the thought of Irene Flanders, and as Miss Trowbridge

recalled the suggestion that possibly the girl was about to be left in a lonely position, she began to take pleasure in imagining a condition of things in which she might have the satisfaction of doing a real service to this unknown child of her old lover. Not a pulse moved faster at the thought of Richard Flanders, but in her dread of growing *ennui* in the future weeks, it was a comforting thought that she might serve a lonely young girl, secure for herself bright companionship, and gratify some curiosity concerning the child whose mother she might have been.

"If I write her, I must do so at once before her father sails, as I know only his business address," she thought. "I could invite her for a couple of weeks, and if she proved disagreeable I could let her go at the end of that time. If she is attractive, why, Leo is safely away, and she could stay till time for him to return. Perhaps she has friends and her summer plans are all made, but it will do no harm to ask her. I must think of it. I can see that Polly Thorne will be the same as lost to me."

CHAPTER II.

PHINEAS THORNE.

THE Thornes belonged to that portion of the population of Proctor which lived in the village the year around. Instead of being fashionable, Miss Polly was wont to say, they were contented.

When new people discovered that the village was a picturesque locality for summer houses and put up their expensive cottages, she did not attempt to make the acquaintance of the new-comers, but was as happy without them, in her homely fashion, as they were without her. All old residents knew and liked the Thornes, and Polly and Phineas were as much at home amid the dainty luxuries of The Eyrie, and a few similar residences belonging to old friends, as they were in their own cosey sitting-room. In certain matters Polly Thorne and Emma Trowbridge were kindred spirits. The former was as devoted, body and soul, to her brother, as the latter was to her nephew, and although Polly frequently deplored aloud the fact that

Phineas seemed so indifferent to all thought of marriage, in her secret soul smouldered a jealousy ready to burst into flame toward any woman outside his own four walls, who should interest him.

Phineas Thorne was by profession a lawyer, but he was one of those men occasionally sent into the world who seem irresistibly impelled to help others, — one of those beings whom no hampering conditions can prevent from exercising their mission of good-will toward men. In person he was commonplace in height and figure, and now, at the age of thirty-five, his brown hair was growing thin above his temples. His eyes, of course, were fine. That sort of soul beautifies its face, and especially its eyes, with a steadfast, kindly light. His sister reverenced and looked up to him, though his elder by many years, and he was generally considered among the inhabitants as the mainstay of the village.

It was hardly to be expected that the appeal to Miss Thorne to receive her friend's child would meet with any check from him. Polly's brow was still drawn in a little frown as she stood in the shaded side porch that evening, picking off the dead leaves from some vines as she waited, from time to time glancing down the road where she expected to see her brother's buggy appear.

"It's the way things always happen," she murmured. "If I hadn't specially wanted him, he'd have been home half an hour ago. There, it's striking six now! It's enough to provoke a saint."

But her endurance was not to be further taxed on the present occasion. A smile of satisfaction beamed across her face at sight of the swift trotting mare that sped around the corner of the road, drawing an open buggy, and in it, Phineas.

"I began to think you weren't coming to-night at all," she cried, as the horse, eager to reach the barn, flew by the spot where she stood. Then she went into the house and into the kitchen, filled an old-fashioned silver tea-pot, and produced a number of biscuit from the spotless cloth which had enveloped them.

"Everything's sort of kept over," she said, coming into the dining-room, and setting the tea and biscuit on the table as her brother entered from the porch, "so I'm afraid things won't taste just right."

"Yes; I had to stop at the blacksmith's, and he kept me to talk of some ground he thinks of buying," replied Phineas, who looked like a man who had not been allowed time to think about himself for so long, that when at last the pause came he was surprised at his own weariness. He leaned back in his chair and did not offer to touch the delicacies his sister spread

before him. She looked at his square, strong face with a scrutiny full of anxiety.

"Now, what in the world, Phineas Thorne, have you been doing to-day? I shouldn't wonder a mite if you'd driven clear to Riverhead."

"Yes, I have. It has been warm, hasn't it?"

"And you in that open buggy without a bit of an umbrella, and all the rest of the things you had to attend to to-day. Oh, you child! You ought to remember, Phineas," she added, seriously, "you aren't as young as you were once."

Her brother laughed quietly. "You ridiculous Polly! Which will you have me? An infant, or a superannuated invalid? I can't be both, you know. Hold on a minute," as she seized his teacup. "I'll drink it in a minute. Give me time to get my bearings and realize that it's evening, and that I'm at home, and that your pinks here" — there was a saucer filled with them on the table — "are spicing the air, and that you look particularly nice in that green dress." Polly's dress was blue, but she was far from minding the slight mistake. Her cheeks colored with pleasure. "I can't grow old until you begin, you know," he continued, "so that seems to settle the question of superannuation, doesn't it?"

Miss Thorne persisted in taking the cup. "That

may all be," she said vaguely, "but while *I* preside at your table you aren't going to drink cold tea." It was a favorite fiction with her to pretend that she was in daily danger of being deposed from her position. "Phineas," she began again, swiftly emptying and replenishing the cup, "while you've been attending to the whims and bothers of everybody between here and Riverhead, from the blacksmith up, I've been almost wild with an anxiety of my own, and just as soon as you begin to eat I'll tell you about it."

This encouraging offer hardly acted as a spur on the tired man's appetite, but mechanically, from a habit of obliging, he began his meal.

"You *see*," began Polly," I got another letter this morning from Mrs. Cox, and it *seems* her husband is out of health and she's got to go to Europe with him this summer." She paused impressively.

"Hm! Well, I don't see why you should be anxious or disturbed about that."

"Why, of course I'm not," said Polly, impatiently. "I'm disturbed, and I guess you will be too, because she wants to send her daughter to us to keep while she's gone."

Miss Thorne studied her brother's face to see how this news would strike him.

"What good ham this is!" he said, unconscious of exasperating by his irrelevancy. "Give me some more, please, Polly. I'm finding out how hungry I am."

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked his sister, complying with some asperity.

"It's delicious."

"Oh, it is! Since when have you enjoyed having strange children around under foot?"

"The ham I'm talking about, Polly; as to the child, take her or not as you please. You are the one whom she would annoy, if either of us. There is no obligation that I see, either way."

This quiet reception of what had seemed to Miss Thorne a most startling proposition, had the effect of disconcerting her momentarily.

"'Tisn't such a very easy thing to decide," she began presently. "Isabel Cox was a vain thing when she was Isabel Billings, and she hasn't got over it, it seems. Hear what she says," she continued, drawing a letter from her pocket.

"'My dear Polly,—I have come to a difficult spot in life, and wonder if you will not help me out, though it is years since you have seen me or mine. You always were a good-natured little thing, one of

the sort of persons whom people naturally impose upon, and so I muster courage to ask you if you would take my little girl, and keep her while I go abroad with my poor sick husband, who is obliged to take the sea voyage. I took Susan with us last summer, and my experience then convinces me that if I am to be able to devote myself to Mr. Cox as he needs, I must leave her behind. Some friends have offered to take her with them to the seashore, but I would not trust her in any public place without me. She is really so pretty as to be a great care, but I feel sure in your quiet home she would give you no trouble, and be safe and happy. Unless you object, she will bring with her a toy dog to which she is much attached. You see I know your soft heart so well, I already count upon the certainty of your consent.

"'Fondly yours,

"'ISABEL COX.'

"She hasn't been 'fondly mine' before for ten years," observed Miss Thorne grimly when she had finished. She folded the letter and looked at her brother. "Do you believe it's because she's pretty that her mother doesn't want to take that child across? Isn't it a good deal more likely that the young one

performs so like a wild Arab that Isabel's ashamed of her?"

"Well, Polly, I don't know, I'm sure. The little thing wouldn't annoy me, but I do not want you to be annoyed either, and Mrs. Cox has no claim upon you; so if you are disinclined, just say no."

"I don't believe you'd like it, Phineas Thorne, if I did say no," she returned, with a half-resentful look at him.

Phineas smiled in his quiet way without looking up from his plate. "I have perfect faith in your judgment in the matter, my dear Polly."

"You know you think I ought to take her," exclaimed his sister irritably.

"Do *you* think you ought to?" he asked.

Polly sighed heavily, and they were both silent for a minute or two. Then she spoke in a resigned tone.

"I suppose I'd better get your mug and that little knife and fork out of the old chest up attic to-morrow, if she's coming."

CHAPTER III.

IRENE FLANDERS.

TWO days afterward, Mr. Richard Flanders came into the parlor of his boarding-house in the upper part of New York city, in search of his daughter.

He found her sitting behind the closed shutters of an open window, languidly waving a fan, with a look of endurance on her face, common to the feminine population of boarding-houses, who, as a rule, have a wealth of unhappy leisure in which to bemoan the annoyances of temperature or storm.

Mr. Flanders was stout and had a florid countenance. He wore side-whiskers, and was clad in a checked suit, which heightened the rotundity of his appearance. He carried an open letter in his hand, which, after a comprehensive glance about the room to make sure that his daughter was alone, he waved with a triumphant air.

"Well, the question regarding summer plans is settled, so far as I am concerned."

"What is it?" asked Irene, losing her listless air, and becoming infected with his pleasant excitement.

"It is decided that I am to go to London," said Mr. Flanders, laying the letter in her lap. "There has been a directors' meeting in Boston, and, as you will see, it was unanimously decided that I was the best man to send over there to make the preliminary moves towards forming a new stock company. You wouldn't understand the business part of it even if I explained it to you; — but they are right," he continued, with an air of impartial judgment. "I am the right man for them."

"Am I going?" asked the girl, eagerly.

"Ho, ho! my child, of course not," laughed the other, leniently. "What should I do with you on such a trip?"

"What you do right along. Leave me to take care of myself."

The father heard no reproach in the quick reply, if any existed. He only shook his head decidedly. "Couldn't afford it, Irene. I must live handsomely while I'm there. No cheap boarding arrangements," with a depreciating glance around the room where they sat; "it wouldn't do. Everything must be in bang-up style. Money comes where money is. You couldn't understand the necessity of the thing, my

dear, or the influence it exerts. All this will be at the company's expense, but I could hardly ask them to send you on the same terms." Mr. Flanders laughed again with the ready good-humor induced by the prospect of a season's sojourn in congenial surroundings and on a congenial errand.

There was a strange look in the depths of his daughter's eyes. "Have you considered what shall be done with me?" she asked after a pause.

"No, but I must," replied the other, taking the letter again and folding it. "I suppose you couldn't stay right along here," he suggested tentatively.

"Oh, yes, I could," replied the girl. "You might, however, go up into my room now and make a little calculation as to its probable temperature in July and August."

"Hotter than blazes, I expect," assented her father; and then he seemed to be studying the case meditatively for a quiet moment, during which the essence of loneliness filled Irene's soul with a bitter flood.

"It is a great pity that girls cannot stay at school forever without any holidays," she said. Her heart beat painfully at the renewed consciousness of the difference between this reality and the plans she had cherished when a school-girl. She had foreseen a home in which her father should be surprised at her

ability as housekeeper, home-maker, and sympathetic companion, idealizing the father himself into a being far different from the restless, worldly, and brusque individual with whom, upon leaving school, she found herself obliged to undertake a nomadic existence. For two years she had lived the life of boarding-houses alternating briefly with hotels, — a hard life for a handsome, emotional, motherless girl to lead, and yet to retain the delicate, intangible bloom which is the maiden's highest ornament. Not staying long enough under any one roof to form permanent friendships, she was singularly isolated from those of her own sex who would have been useful to her, and her own intuitive reserve deepened and grew by a mode of life which developed this unconscious sort of self-defence.

It had been an overwhelming surprise and disappointment to her to discover that she had nothing in common with her father. It had been, and still was, a deep wound both to heart and pride to find that he had no need of her; that she was a mere superfluity in his life. His only interests seemed to be those of business, and any effort which she made to understand them, in the forlorn hope of finding a common ground on which she might sometimes stand with him, was always carelessly rebuffed.

"Tell any one who asks you what my business is, that your father is a financier," he would reply to her questioning; and though he seemed to find vast gratification in the term, she never understood it, and never found that his financiering brought them a sufficiency of ready money, nor seemed to bring one whit nearer the quiet home life for which she yearned. She had endured a great deal, this young girl, a great deal of loneliness by day and by night, in the last two years, yet now she realized how she had depended upon her father's moral support, indifferent as it was; how she had depended upon seeing his face at meal-times, albeit at a public table, and with never a look in it indicative of a more personal sympathy with her than for the accidental neighbor with whom he discussed stocks. After all, he was her father, he had always treated her civilly. Indeed he was her all; and the sudden realization of what an endless time the summer would seem without him, combined with the ever-fresh sorrow of his carelessness of her, gave her a sense of wretched faintness. Even her father noticed her pallor as she leaned back in her chair.

"What's the matter, Irene? Sick this morning?" he asked uneasily.

"No, not at all. The heat has come so suddenly and unseasonably, — and so has this news. I am

going to miss you dreadfully, father," she finished, desperately.

"Oh, no, you won't," he returned, with that finality with which his class of men dispose of an unpleasant proposition.

"Brace up, Irene," he continued, kindly. "I didn't mean really to suggest your staying here all summer. It is going to be infernally hot in New York this year, I expect. Now say where you'd like to go. I shall be having all my expenses paid besides making something by the way, and you shall go where you like, in moderation. Now where shall it be? Seashore? Mountains?"

"How can I go to any of those places alone?" Irene tried hard not to speak reproachfully.

"I don't see why you couldn't go alone, so far as that is concerned. You'd make friends fast enough. Well, think it over. I must go. Where is that girl going to be, — that school-friend you used to talk about, — the one that lives in Chicago? Don't you want to go and see her?"

"Susan Farley?"

"Yes. Write to her and feel her pulse. May be she'd be glad to have you. It is cool in Chicago, too."

Mr. Flanders went out of the room and slammed

the door behind him. Irene told herself that he was very kind. He had thought of Susan Farley quite of his own accord as a means of giving her pleasure. A mental picture of this schoolmate rose before her, — *petite*, golden-haired, roguish. How eagerly Susan had watched for her mother's coming during the last week of school! How her eyes had sparkled and her dimples had seemed to multiply when she saw a carriage stop at the door and her mother descend from it! What a tender smile was on that mother's face as she recognized her daughter! How Susan flung herself into her arms, Irene unconsciously and hungrily watching the fervent mutual embrace; and how Susan's joy culminated in sobs as she cried, "Mamma! mamma!"

Suddenly, unpremeditatedly, — for never would Irene have chosen the parlor of her boarding-house as the spot in which to indulge such unusual emotion, — her own breast was convulsed with the heavy sobs in which her sore heart found vent. She cried bitterly, forgetful of her surroundings, forgetful of everything but that she was the saddest, most friendless orphan that the sun ever shone upon, hungering for a mother's love, smarting under a father's indifference. In the midst of her wild weeping the door

opened. She did not look up, but she heard her father's voice in accents of profound wonder.

"Irene!"

She raised her hand and motioned to him to leave the room; but for half a minute he did not stir. He never before had seen his daughter shed tears. The sight counfounded him. On the few occasions when he had considered her at all, her disposition, her opinions, her looks, he had stood a little in awe of her. She was not gay, nor impulsive, nor daring. She had none of the attributes that he would have understood in a girl. She was serious, reserved; but now he told himself that girls were all alike, after all.

"Why, of course," he thought, "she wants to go to Europe as any other girl would, only it isn't her way to tease."

He advanced and stood awkwardly beside her. Her soft dark hair lay nearly under his hand, yet it was an alien hand, and knew not how to venture a comforting touch. "Look here, Irene," he began, his full face growing redder under the stress of anxiety, "stop this, like a sensible girl. Some of the boarders will be coming in in a minute. I'd take you with me if I could afford it, since you want so much to go, but it's just as I said. I've got to be a

swell while I'm there, and do as the swells do. To pay your expenses on a similar scale would break me."

"Yes, — yes, — I understand," — returned the girl spasmodically; "I understand perfectly."

"I'll take you with me the next time I go. There, I've promised." Then, as his daughter rapidly controlled herself, "I came back to give you a letter I had forgotten. Do tell me what correspondent you have in Proctor," he added, pleased to make a diversion. "That's my native place, and I haven't thought of it in a dozen years."

Irene dried her eyes and took the letter, a choking in her throat and a trembling of her hands remaining as evidence of her agitation.

"I know no one in Proctor," she said, falteringly, opening the envelope. Her father seated himself beside her, and at a sign from her, looked over her shoulder at the letter, which they read simultaneously.

"Proctor, Mass., June 2, 18—.

"My Dear Miss Flanders, — I am an old friend of your father's, and I have often thought I would like to know you. I learn through a friend that your father contemplates a business trip to London, and that you do not accompany him. If you have not

promised to go elsewhere, will you not come and make me a two weeks' visit? My nephew has left me quite alone here, and I am selfish in asking for your company in my solitude; so I beg you to be equally honest in declining my invitation if circumstances offer you something pleasanter than the exceeding quiet of my home. If you come, let it be soon, and believe me, in any case,

"Your sincere friend,

"EMMA TROWBRIDGE."

"Emma Trowbridge, by all that's good and great!" exclaimed Mr. Flanders in amazement. He stared at the letter, and then burst into a hearty laugh. "Well, 'Holdfast's a good dog.' I believe the woman's after me yet."

"Who is she? What does it mean?" asked Irene, by no means reassured by her father's merriment. He struck his broad knee with a resounding slap.

"Who is she? Why, an old flame of mine who's rolling in money by this time. Go to her, by all means, and be as sweet as you can. When I come back I'll go down to Proctor and reconnoitre with a field glass, and if the old girl's nose is any smaller, and she can walk without waddling, perhaps I'll marry her, and if I do you're fixed for life, Irene."

The girl looked from her father to the letter, and then back again with a dazed expression.

"Did she — did she care for you?" she asked timidly.

"Simply doted on me."

"Poor, *poor* woman!" said the girl fervently.

"Pooh! you needn't pity her. Obstinate as she was ugly. I couldn't stand it. Shouldn't wonder, by her sending for you, if she was determined to have me yet, and, by George! I'll think of it. I might do worse. She adopted this nephew she speaks of, and has brought him up, and he'll get all the cash unless I step in. I hear she goes in for fashion and society for his sake, and lives in Boston in the winter, with Proctor for summer headquarters. Now, then, Irene, you've fallen on your feet, you see."

"You think I had better go?"

"Suit yourself. You shan't do your father's courting if you don't want to."

"Where else can I go?"

"Give it up!"

"Then, since a stranger has been moved by compassion because you are going to leave me alone, I think that stranger must be my best friend, and I will go to her."

Irene was pale, and her shining eyes caused her father some vague discomfort.

"Then that's settled," he said, rising. "'Tisn't every man that gives his daughter a chance to pronounce in advance on her stepmother," he added jocosely; "but you're a good girl, on the whole, Irene, and give as little trouble as girls ever do, I guess;" and with a pinch of her cheek, by way of parting caress, he hurriedly left the room.

She pressed her hand to the red mark left by the rough fingers on her flesh, rather to retain her father's touch than to rub away the pain. Her dark eyes rested on the letter in her lap, and a wild longing and indignation made tumult in her breast.

Pity for herself and for this unknown woman filled her heart to bursting.

"Are all men like that?" was her only coherent thought.

CHAPTER IV.

SUSAN FARLEY.

WHEN Mr. Flanders came home in the evening after his talk with Irene, he found that she had written a note to Miss Trowbridge accepting her invitation. She handed it to him for inspection, and he read it hurriedly.

"Is it all right?" she asked.

"Yes, the note's all right. I don't know what kind of a trap you'll find you've fallen into when you get there."

"Well, do you mean that I would better have refused?" Irene asked the question eagerly. It would have been a joy to her to find her father exercising even so much active protection of her.

"Oh, no. Better accept," he returned carelessly, "since you don't seem to know what else to do with yourself."

The girl's lips were unsteady when she tried to answer, so she took the letter and moved away in

silence, her tall figure and erect bearing giving her an air of proud independence which strangely belied the longing she felt to throw herself into her father's arms and beg him to think for her a little as other fathers did for their children. Richard Flanders went out to the steps and lit a cigar, and in a minute Irene heard his laugh as he sauntered down the street with one of his fellow-boarders.

She mailed her letter, and in due time received a cordial reply, which urged her speedy coming to Proctor. As this coincided well with her father's plans, a week later found her bidding him adieu at the station from which she was to start. Her lovely eyes filled with tears as they lingered on his jovial, coarse, face.

"Good-by, Irene," he said, kissing her, while his glance wandered about the station; "give my love to the fair Emma, but wait till I'm safely on the other side."

"Oh, father, you *will* write to me?" she said in a low voice, clinging to his hand.

"Of course, of course!"

"And I shall write to you," she continued wistfully.

"Yes, when you feel like it. Don't bother yourself."

"But I shall want to. What will be your address?"

"City Bank, at first. Now, then, time's up. It would be a good joke if the train carried me off, willy-nilly, into the clutches of the ogress. By George, Irene, I pity you! Good-by!" and he jumped from the train.

Irene's bosom swelled painfully, and large tear-drops welled over upon her cheeks as the train glided on. She held her handkerchief to her eyes for many minutes, a still figure, her chair turned half toward the window and half toward the vacant seat in front of her. She could not tell how much time had elapsed before there was a little commotion in the aisle beside her, the neighboring chair was swung around with its back toward her, and a woman ensconced herself in it with considerable rustle of draperies.

Irene glanced up and saw some stiff gray feathers standing up spikily above the chair back, and a portion of a gray dress protruding into the aisle; then she looked out of the window and began a dreary review of late events.

The passenger in front of her was evidently a person in whom the desirable quality of repose was lacking. She fidgeted in her chair, swinging it toward the win

dow in order to obtain a foot-rest on the ledge above the steam-pipes, then whirled about toward the aisle to avoid the ray of sunlight which slanted across the magazine she had opened. At last she took off her high gray hat and wound a scarf of black lace around her fair hair. In performing these manœuvres she continually sent quick, fleeting looks toward Irene's grave profile, and finally the latter became disturbed by all these slight commotions, and brought her slow glance fully to bear on her mercurial neighbor. The effect was magical.

"It *is* you, you dear old Irene!" exclaimed the blond young woman rapturously, turning her chair so as to face her friend as nearly as possible, and leaning forward to squeeze the latter's hand between both her own. "Here I've been on needles and pins for the last ten minutes, not knowing whether it was you or not, because you *would* hold your handkerchief to your lips and gaze out the window, looking as though you had just parted from *him*."

"I have. He is going to London for three months," said Irene piteously.

"What a shame! Why didn't you get married and go with him?"

Irene looked perplexed. "Oh, I mean my father,"

she said after a pause. "There isn't any other him — no, indeed," shaking her head quickly.

"Well, your father could receive no higher compliment than a photograph of the dismal look with which you've been withering the Connecticut fields ever since I caught sight of you. You won't catch me looking that way, although by a coincidence my mother is just starting for Europe too. No, indeed! I'm just vexed with mamma because she wouldn't take me with her."

"We are companions in misery, then. My father wouldn't take me either."

"What have you been doing with yourself these two years, Irene? I can't get over the delightful fact that I should have come way from Chicago and then happened to choose this morning of all others to go to Boston. They told me there wasn't a seat left in the parlor car, but I had arranged for Bijou to be taken care of on this train, and of course he couldn't come alone, and I thought I'd rather endure a day car than to change my plans, and then, after I was all settled in there, the conductor came and told me this chair was vacant, and here you were! Now do tell me, you dear thing!"

"Tell you what?"

"Where you've been the last year. I know I

haven't been very good about writing since I left school myself a year ago, but mamma took me to Europe last summer, and you've no idea the number of things I've had to keep me busy; but I've always thought about you, Irene, more or less, and I've been determined to have you come out to Chicago and visit me. It's the nicest place in the world."

"I've been going on doing just the same thing," said Irene, after pausing to see if her friend were really through speaking; "boarding with father, mostly in New York, although last winter we were in Washington a part of the time."

"Ah, how delightful! I know you enjoyed that!"

"Oh, not in the way you mean," Irene's colorless cheek flushed a little; "I have never gone into society at all."

"Never gone into society at all?" repeated her friend in such sincere dismay and commiseration that Irene colored more deeply and shook her head.

"Never at all," she admitted again.

This shock seemed almost to paralyze the faculties of her friend, and there ensued a minute of silence before the latter came to the rescue with an heroic effort.

"That accounts for your looking even fresher and handsomer than you did two years ago. Brunettes

look so wretched at the end of a season, usually. Why, even I, — I know I look thin enough to scare you. I'm a perfect rail. I didn't find rest for the sole of my foot all winter long, and look at my hair! Do you notice anything?" She pushed back the lace from her head.

"Pretty as ever!" said Irene, inspecting the fluffy blond mass.

"Why, Irene Flanders, that's base flattery, just because I said you looked fresh! You know it has grown three shades darker since you saw it last. I'm the most unlucky girl that ever lived, anyway. When mamma decided to marry papa Cox, I told her it was just my luck. I should have dearly loved to be Miss Farley-somebody with a hyphen, but how could I use such an ugly name as Cox! Farley-Cox! It would be enough to prejudice people against me, — and now my hair is getting dark!"

"And mamma refuses to take you to Europe?" laughed Irene.

"Precisely, and for such a silly reason. She says she can't watch me while I'm talking to the Count *De No-Account*, and yet take proper care of Papa Cox." Miss Farley took pity on the perplexity that again overspread her friend's countenance. "Simply she means that I flirt a little."

"Oh! and do you?"

"Ye-es, just about as much as any self-respecting girl. The fact is, mamma's been just as good to me as she could be all winter, and she says I've nearly killed her with late hours, and she will not be bothered with me until she has had a chance to recruit. It was a regular declaration of independence she made me. I tried to be independent in return, so I said, 'Very well, and I will go with Mrs. Holman and the girls to Long Branch!' 'No, you will not, Susan,' said she; 'I shouldn't have an easy minute. Now haven't you had everything you've asked for this winter?' I had to admit that I had. 'Then do consent to my wishes for the summer, and don't give me any more perplexity and anxiety than I have now!' Poor mamma! She looked so much in earnest that I consented, and the amount of it is that I am being packed off down into the country where mamma has some old friends in a little bit of an inland place, where I am to be left till called for. There's nobody to flirt with but cows and sign-posts, and how I ever came to consent I don't know. I suspect Bijou feels silly and forlorn enough, but no worse than I did until I saw you. Poor Bijou, he's the only person that will understand me, or that I shall understand, till I get back again to the North

side. I suppose you are on your way to some refreshing spot?"

"I do not know. I am going to visit a lady I never saw, in a place I never saw. An old friend of my father, who fancies she wishes to know me."

"Where is it, Irene? Supposing it should be near enough for me to visit you occasionally, just to gain a lucid interval, and keep up my practice in the English language!"

"I am going to Proctor, about twenty miles from Boston."

Miss Farley forgot the proprieties of a public conveyance, and nearly shrieked aloud in her excitement.

"Why it's the very *place!* It's the very place I'm going. I'll never say I'm unlucky again!" she exclaimed joyfully.

Irene's face lit up with an equal pleasure, and her heart warmed at the consciousness of being so valued, even as a last resort.

"With you and Bijou I'm sure I can be happy," continued the glib Susan. "You will know him now! Just think how nice! He is a King Charles that my German teacher gave me a year ago in Berlin, and I called him Karl until I got beyond Herr Spiegel's hearing, out of compliment; but the poor little

fellow was delighted when we got to Paris and I could change his name to Bijou. Everything in my trunk, Irene, is an implement of murder. I came prepared to kill time. Now we shall kill it together. How delightful! I knew I shouldn't need any clothes, so I didn't take up room uselessly. I brought my tennis suit for comfort. Of course I knew I shouldn't have any one to play tennis with. I tried to teach Bijou, and you've no idea how far he can run on his hind legs, and he barks just as if he enjoyed it; but he can't hold the racket, and so that spoils everything."

"You might teach me, perhaps, only I am so large," said Irene.

"You are large, aren't you?" said the other, enviously, surveying her friend's superb proportions; "but that doesn't make any difference about your learning."

At Boston, Bijou was liberated and fondly introduced to Irene. Then the girls drove across the city, and, taking their tickets for Proctor, finally arrived rather weary and warm at their destination at nine o'clock in the evening.

It was too dark when they got out on the platform to see much of their surroundings.

"What a sweet country smell there is!" said Irene.

"I can't bear the country," returned Susan curtly, looking, with her toy spaniel under her arm, a fitter figure for Broadway than for Proctor. "I should simply die if you weren't here, Irene."

The latter was looking around the platform in a business-like manner for the driver who Miss Trowbridge had promised should meet her. She caught sight, under the depot lights, of a man looking vaguely about as if expecting some one, so she advanced to him.

"Are you from Miss Trowbridge?" she said.

"No," he answered; and although the reply was as simple in manner as in amount, and he did not lift his hat in addressing her, she felt at once that he was no one's servant; "but I saw Miss Trowbridge's man here. I will speak to him for you. May I ask if you saw a little girl get off here?"

"I did not." Then, a sudden idea striking her, "I wonder if you mean Miss Farley? She was expecting to meet friends here."

"Yes; I didn't know whether she called herself Farley or Cox."

"Farley," said Irene, smiling at the remembrance of the coveted hyphen, and leading the way to where Susan still stood caressing Bijou's silky ears.

"Here is your friend, Susan."

"Ah! Mr. Thorne," said Miss Farley, offering her hand with condescension. Phineas shook it kindly.

"How do you do, Susan?" he said simply. "Come this way, please," he added, turning to Irene, who was choking with laughter at the frozen surprise on her friend's face.

"Good-night, Susan!" she murmured, kissing her.

"Did you ever see such coolness! He must be a boor," Susan whispered in return. "Good-night, dear! Remember I am at Miss Thorne's, and come and see me as soon as you can."

Irene followed Phineas to where a low broad phaeton stood by the platform. Its driver was sitting composedly within, displaying a serene trust that his passenger would find him. He received Irene with stolid composure, turning down one side of the duster to allow her to enter.

"Moses, you should have let this lady know you were here," said Phineas.

"Thought she did know it. Miss Trowbridge said she did," returned the boy gruffly.

"It is all right," said Irene, looking at Thorne. "Thank you!" and the phaeton rolled away.

Phineas went back to Miss Farley. His quiet sense of humor was touched to discover her so evidently a young lady, although a very small one.

They were both rather silent on the drive home, after he had asked her if she was tired from her journey and she had admitted that she was.

Once she spoke to compliment the horse and to comment on its swiftness. "Can a lady drive him?" she asked.

"No," replied Phineas.

"He *is* a boor," she thought.

The cottage was well lighted when they approached it, and Polly had worked herself up to the pitch of a warm welcome for the child whose mother, about to start for foreign climes, had entrusted a precious treasure to her keeping. She threw open the door at the sound of wheels, and backed into the hall in order to let Susan enter before she embraced her. But instead of cordially advancing when Susan did enter, Miss Thorne stepped back still further, utterly unable for an instant to control her dismay at sight of the high hat, the huge tournure, the faultlessly fashionable dress, the exquisite little blond face, and, more than all, the tiny black dog with his plaintive eyes.

Susan tucked Bijou up a little higher, and advanced, holding out her hand.

"Miss Thorne, this is kind of you," she said. It

was what her mother had told her to say when she should meet her hostess.

"Will he bite?" gasped Miss Thorne, extending a reluctant hand, and keeping an eye on Bijou, who, unconscious of inspiring fear, now gave a prodigious yawn after the fatigues of the day, causing Polly to jump back to a safer distance.

Susan laughed, and administered a pat on the little muzzle. "Shame on you!" she said. "How many times have I told you to put your paw over your mouth when you do that! — No, indeed, Miss Thorne, you could not make him bite. I frankly confess that *I* am starving, but will you let me go up stairs and wash my face and hands? I feel so soiled!"

Miss Thorne replied as cordially as she was able, and pulled herself up stairs by the slender banister, followed by her guest. When she had shown the latter her room, and set a lighted lamp on the bureau, she moved down stairs again like one in a dream. At sight of her brother standing with twinkling eyes in the middle of the parlor, she became animated, and rushed into the room with both hands uplifted.

"Phineas, Phin-e-*as*! Sh! Sh! Sh!" for his

laughter threatened to burst forth. "I do believe the dog's the worst part of it all!" groaned Polly.

"Didn't her mother ask you if Susan might bring a toy dog from whom she could not bear to be parted?" asked Phineas, bubbling over with merriment.

"Yes, but of course I thought it was a woolly plaything dog, such as any Christian child enjoys," replied his sister, in an agonized whisper. "Phineas — Phineas *Thorne!*" she added, pinching his arm until he cringed.

"What's the matter now?"

"I've left a picture-book on her stand! It's flaming red and yellow. I bought it at the village today. Oh, do go up and get it. No you can't, of course."

Phineas wiped his eyes. "She won't notice it, perhaps. She'll be in a hurry to come down to tea, and then you can slip up and get it."

"I've learned a *lesson*," said Polly, turning stern. "It's this. Don't be too obliging. We're in for it now. Oh, *Land!* Comfort's gone for us, Phineas!"

"Oh, perhaps not. A friend came with her on the train, and has gone to Miss Trowbridge's. Perhaps they will spend a good deal of time together.

"A lady?"

"Yes."

Polly shook her head mournfully. "This is bad, *bad*, Phineas. You must stand by me."

Then, with sudden recollection, she hurried into the dining-room, and seizing the silver mug and small knife and fork from the table, she put them out of sight in a closet.

CHAPTER V.

A FOND AUNT.

BETWEEN the time of receiving Miss Trowbridge's unexpected invitation and the moment of starting for Proctor, Irene wrought herself into an unusual state of warm and sympathetic feeling toward her unknown entertainer. She knew by experience what a woman might be made to suffer who loved Richard Flanders, and it might really be, as he had coarsely suggested, that this woman loved him still. Irene loyally leaned toward the belief that he was right, and this idea gave her unknown friend a tender interest for her.

Her heart beat fast as the stone walls of The Eyrie loomed stately and tall through the darkness. The stolid Moses clucked to the horse to encourage him up the last and steepest part of the winding road that approached the house, and as he stopped beneath a *porte-cochère* Irene saw, under a jewelled lantern that hung in the vestibule, the tall figure of her host-

ess waiting. As the girl stepped from the phaeton she was conscious of trembling with excitement. It was to her in her lonely life a supreme moment thus to come face to face with a woman utterly strange, yet bound to her by a tender tie; the woman, too, to whom she felt gratitude for stretching out a helping hand to her in the time of need.

She felt scarcely able to speak, and welcomed with relief the frank cordiality with which Miss Trowbridge took both her hands and kissed her cheek. There was no shade of embarrassment in the manner of her hostess as she led her guest into a reception room and looked curiously and kindly into the girl's face.

"Two privileges I want you to grant me at once," she said; "one is to call you by your first name, and the other is to let me stare at you for a minute."

"The first by all means, and the second under protest," replied Irene; "for I am soiled, and first impressions are so important!"

"I can make allowance for cinders. H'm! you do not resemble your father."

Irene colored violently.

"Your mother, I suppose. I never saw her. Thank you, my dear!" Here Miss Trowbridge released the girl's hands. "So you are twenty years

old, and as tall as I am! It is not very often that I look straight across into any one's eyes, and seldom up, excepting into Leo's. Leo is my nephew," speaking more softly and with plainly moistening eyes. "He is away. We are separated for the first time in his life."

"Ah, I see you miss him very much," said Irene gently.

"I scarcely know how to live without him," said the other, turning away with a gesture, as of impatience with herself. "You see your occupation, Irene. It is to give me forgetfulness of Leo for two weeks."

"It is really but two weeks, then," thought the girl, with a quick glance about the room and a little pang of regret.

"Then you must describe his ways, that I may amuse you as he did," she said aloud.

"Poor child, you are likely to hear enough of him. I know my failings; but I will have some mercy. We won't begin now when I know you are tired and hungry."

Irene was shown to her room, where, after she had bathed her face and hands, a dainty lunch was served, which her hostess shared; then they had some further talk, mostly about the village and its

residents, during which it transpired who had been Irene's travelling companion, and Miss Trowbridge laughed over the confusion from which she knew her friend Polly would suffer in discovering the age and condition of Mrs. Cox's "little girl."

"But it will be very pleasant for you and Miss Farley to have one another here," she said when she rose to say good-night. "I hope it will be an interchange of obligations between you and me, Irene. I hope you will find as much pleasure in our fortnight together as I shall."

"More, I am sure, Miss Trowbridge," replied the guest in a low, grateful voice. "You will never know what kindness it was to give me this refuge in which I can remain until I have time to make my plans for the summer."

Miss Trowbridge's face looked thoughtful as she sought her own room. "She is really charming," she said to herself. "I have drawn a prize. I don't know whether she is handsome or not; certainly not in the least pretty; but that look in her eyes as she thanked me — it was positively magnetic. No, I hardly think she would be considered a beauty, still, if Leo were here I would send her away to-morrow."

Irene, left alone, immediately began to scrutinize the beautiful room assigned to her use. It was deco-

rated with dainty yet lavish fancy, and the girl passed from one thing of beauty to the next, revelling in the pleasure of temporary possession, and lingering long over a cut-glass bowl of roses that held all the sweetness of June in their glowing bosoms. At last she turned down the lights and stood at her open window, straining her eyes to obtain an idea of the surroundings. All was still under the clear starlight save the breeze stirring the branches of the trees.

"I shall wake up here to-morrow," she thought, smiling with pleasure at the thought; "then all these lovely secrets will be unfolded."

As she nestled down into bed, she turned a very grateful heart to the Providence who had led her to Proctor. To one of the teachers at school, and to her own intuition, Irene owed what ideas she had on the subject of religion. They were practical and faithful, and she dared not consider what her life the last few years would have been without them. She had been saved by them from a morbid conviction of uselessness, which might have driven her arbitrarily to end her weariness; and now it was not to chance that she gave thanks for the turn of events that had made her a guest under Miss Trowbridge's roof.

When she awoke the next morning she could not at once remember where she was. The sun shone bril-

liantly. Her room was large and airy. The robins were calling in the trees outside, otherwise the stillness seemed intense to ears used to the early noises of New York streets. To-day her father was to sail. That was her first thought, and it brought a sigh with it. Her next sensation was in realizing the luxuriousness of her bed; then the charm of the bird notes and the crystal air drew her to a semicircle of windows in one corner of the apartment, where she uttered a little cry of delight at sight of the lake sparkling below, at the foot of the tree-studded declivity, and, beyond the dim woods on its further banks, the soft irregularity of a line of hills against the sky. "What a paradise!" she exclaimed.

"It seems a paradise to me," she repeated to Miss Trowbridge when she met her below stairs, and the latter, pleased with her guest's interest, explored the grounds with her after breakfast, gaining a new insight into the charm of her home, seeing it through these fresh young eyes. Miss Trowbridge by daylight impressed Irene as even less like a person who had suffered and was still suffering from long years of unrequited affection, than she had seemed the previous evening. She was a woman probably more pleasing to the eye at this age than she had been in her young days, and she had a hearty manner which

made her guest feel welcome and thoroughly at ease.

Irene soon found that all subjects of conversation, however remote at the beginning, led ultimately to Leo, as all roads lead to Rome. The lake had excellent fishing, and Leo was a most successful fisherman. That was his boat-house below there to the right. He had engineered a very pretty and successful regatta on the lake last year. Irene admired a lofty and symmetrical fir tree at a little distance, growing above a steep face of the gray rock, and immediately learned that it was from that tree that Leo had fallen at the age of ten and sprained his ankle. She remarked upon the strange formation of a boulder, and was dramatically informed that Leo had once blasted it open with gunpowder, thereby nearly frightening his relative into a premature grave. Before the morning was over Irene concluded that Miss Trowbridge's object in sending for her had been to enjoy repeating her nephew's biography to fresh ears. She had no time to indulge any of her recent speculations regarding her hostess' sentiments toward her old-time lover. Once Irene sighed and said, "My father sails to-day."

"Indeed," said Miss Trowbridge politely; "I hope he has as fine weather as this. Leo is a wonderfully

good sailor, and so kind and attentive to me when we are crossing. I suffer miseries on the ocean."

Fortunately, all her surroundings were so novel and pleasant that Irene felt very lenient toward Miss Trowbridge's mania. She found herself relieved by it from much talking, and enjoyed using all her senses but that of hearing while the fond aunt rambled on.

Of course Leo's pictures were produced at an early stage of their acquaintance. Miss Trowbridge had a box of them, twenty-four in number, arranged in order, one taken each year of her darling's life. Irene's only wonder, by this time, being that the house was not papered with them, she examined the two dozen with a proper show of interest. Leo in white dresses, in kilts, in knickerbockers, in roundabouts. Leo sternly dignified in his first silk hat, and again in rowing costume, with folded arms, displaying his finely developed biceps. Irene politely inspected them all, looking with considerable interest at the twenty-fourth photograph, which showed the close-cropped head and carefully trained moustache of Miss Trowbridge's heir as he dazzled society at the present day.

"He has a fine face," she said as she returned the picture.

"You do see that there is some excuse for me, do you not?" said the other with a pleased laugh; "and now, if it suits you, we will take a drive. You must be tired of listening to my reminiscences."

Irene greatly enjoyed rolling along in the comfortable victoria, behind the plump bay horses in their silver-trimmed harness. This time it was not Moses, but a dignified and correct coachman, who was the driver. The roads were good, the borders of the lake picturesque, and the cottages fanciful and often costly. Irene longed to ask that they might visit Susan, but hesitated to interfere with her hostess' plans. She was relieved, therefore, when her companion introduced the subject.

"I must show you where the Thornes live," said the latter. "Miss Thorne is a good friend of mine, but I have not told her that I expected you. I shall give her a surprise if she sees us."

As they neared the little house which Miss Trowbridge pointed out, Irene looked about eagerly for signs of her friend. She saw her at once sitting on a rustic seat, dressed in a suit of blue and white flannel, a white Tam O'Shanter on her head, a disregarded book in her lap, and one of her little feet in its low shoe thrust out to roll Bijou back and forth as he lay on his back in the grass. She looked up listlessly

at the sound of the carriage, and gave a pleased exclamation as she recognized Irene.

"That is Susan Farley," said the latter, as she bowed.

"Would you like to stop and speak to her?" asked Miss Trowbridge; and upon Irene's assent the carriage stopped and Susan rose and came forward. Irene introduced her to Miss Trowbridge, and then Polly Thorne, who had observed the scene from the window, came out doors and joined the group. She showed much interest in meeting Irene.

"I knew your father, Miss Flanders, and he would remember me," she said.

"I am just beginning to realize that I am in my father's old home," replied the girl. "It is but recently that I learned he had lived in Proctor. I think men cannot have the same affection for old associations that women have; and then my father is the least sentimental of men." Here poor Irene flushed painfully, convinced that she had made an awkward speech. She was still affected by the conviction that Miss Trowbridge felt a *tendresse* for her fickle lover.

That lady retained her placid expression. "I would like to carry off Miss Farley to have tea with us," she said, studying Susan's prettiness with appre-

ciative eyes. The latter's face lighted eagerly at the suggestion.

"But I shall have to dress," she said.

"Not at all. We three shall be quite alone. I know better than to try to persuade Miss Thorne to desert her brother. I suppose Phineas could come up to The Eyrie after tea and bring Miss Farley home."

"I don't know," said Polly, bridling. "It seems a good deal to ask of him these evenings when he is so tired."

"Never mind, then," returned Miss Trowbridge. "If he doesn't come by half-past nine, I shall know he isn't coming, and Moses can drive Miss Farley home."

"Then I will go, and thank you too," said Susan gayly. "Come up stairs with me, Irene, while I get ready. I will not be long."

Irene obeyed, and Miss Thorne entered the carriage in her place, while the coachman walked the horses slowly up the street.

"I didn't dream you had invited Miss Flanders," said Polly. "Susan spoke of some one being there, but I didn't know it was she."

"No, I thought I would surprise you by following your example."

"My example! Precious little inviting I did, and I should have done still less if I'd known what was coming upon me."

"Why should you mind if she *is* a young lady?" said Miss Trowbridge soothingly.

"Because she is the kind of young lady I despise," retorted Polly. "Nothing solid or sensible about her. It is easy to guess why Isabel wanted not to have the care of her while she was travelling. *Safe* here! Yes, no doubt she's safe here. My house is a prison to such a girl, and she doesn't mind letting it be seen that it is. I've been taken in a perfect trap. Don't talk to me. She says she wants to pay her board, and I shall let her. She wants it purely a business arrangement, and I'm willing to have it so."

"Now, now, Polly, you may do her a great deal of good," said Miss Trowbridge coaxingly. "She will see the solid and sensible side of life with you, and see it attractively put forth too."

Miss Polly tossed her head derisively as Irene and Susan were seen coming back down the path, the latter with her spaniel under her arm.

"Dear Miss Trowbridge!" said Susan as they approached the carriage, "would you mind if Bijou came too? He *needn't* if you don't want him, but he'd love to."

"Certainly, let him come," said Miss Trowbridge graciously. "If Leo were at home they would be great friends."

"Oh, have you a dog, too?" asked Susan, stepping in and seating herself on the small seat Miss Trowbridge had turned down.

"No, I have not."

"But you said Leo — ?"

"Leo is my nephew," said Miss Trowbridge majestically.

Susan subsided with a murmured "Ah?" and Miss Thorne smiled somewhat maliciously as she left the carriage, and Irene re-entering it, it rolled away.

CHAPTER VI.

"JENNY."

"WHAT a lovely place!" said Miss Farley when the two girls were together in Irene's room. "How invigorating!" she continued, as she followed her friend out upon a little balcony which commanded a comprehensive view of the surrounding country. "What an emancipation after that stuffy little Thorne place!"

"Don't be ungrateful, Susan."

"I am not ungrateful. Miss Thorne and I have made a satisfactory business arrangement, which lets me off having to be grateful for my misfortunes. This day has been as long as seven," she finished with a little sigh. "I could have embraced Miss Trowbridge when she invited me up here. What kind of a day have you spent?"

"Delightful!" replied Irene heartily.

"Yes, of course, in this lovely place, and with no Phineas to be bored to death about."

Irene smiled. She was not paying board, and therefore did not feel entitled to dilate upon her hostess' mania.

"Is Miss Thorne a devoted sister?" she inquired. "Well, Miss Trowbridge is very devoted also to the nephew she spoke of, as you will probably discover."

Susan did discover it long before the trio had left the cosey tea-table, but her sensibilities were so soothed by the accustomed surroundings of luxurious living that she entered with unfeigned interest into Miss Trowbridge's wordy sketches. Irene was pleased at their pleasure, and when the three rose from the table it was in an agreeable state of mutual satisfaction. Miss Trowbridge led the girls into the parlor, and there in the soft summer evening light she and Susan fell into conversation regarding events in the world of society. Their language was a foreign one to Irene, but she was quite content, lying back in an arm-chair and absently smoothing Bijou's silky head when the small dog thrust it into her hand. She had determined to put off all planning for the future until the following week. Each day would add to her vigor, and by the time the necessity drew near she should have plenty of courage to meet it.

It was a happy evening for Irene, the happiest she

had known for many a year, and after a while Susan glanced at her and smiled.

"See, Miss Trowbridge, what a picture of serenity Irene makes as she leans against that gold-colored silk! Happy girl! She knows nothing of the rivalries we have been discussing."

"All the better for her," replied the other. "I bother myself with it all only for Leo's sake. You haven't seen his pictures, Miss Farley. I will get them. I have several;" and Miss Trowbridge left the room.

Susan made a grimace. "I begin to be afraid Leomania must be as bad as Phineomania," she said in a low tone.

Irene laughed lazily.

"Have you been through all this?" pursued Susan.

Irene nodded.

Susan's lip curled more scornfully. "I have always heard that men were scarce in New England towns, but I didn't know the women talked you to death about them."

The re-entrance of the hostess interrupted her, and she assumed a conventional smile as the precious box was deposited in her lap. She slipped over the first dozen and a half cards with a quick glance.

"I haven't the least interest in children," she re-

marked with her spoiled-child frankness, "but *these* would be interesting to any right-minded girl," she went on, lifting the photographs more and more slowly. "Isn't he lovely! I think it is just awful of you, Miss Trowbridge, to tantalize us with what might have been if he had only stayed at home this summer."

Miss Trowbridge looked startled at the suggestion. "Oh, no, he is gone," she said, as though to make assurance doubly sure by the declaration.

She hastily gathered up the pictures. This personal view of her treasure did not suit her in the least, and the glance she directed at the saucy, fluffy-haired Susan enlightened that damsel as completely as a ten-minute explanation would have done. The opportunity to tease was irresistible.

"Is it too late to call him back?" she began; but the look that gathered on Miss Trowbridge's face warned her that it would be very easy to go too far, and it was no part of Miss Farley's intention seriously to annoy a person who could so alleviate her summer's woes as could the mistress of The Eyrie, so she laughed lightly. "No, indeed," she added; "I ought to be thankful for this opportunity to vegetate, and I have brought the 'German Meisterschaft' with me. I am surely going to master it this time. I have

brought ever so much solid reading, too. I thought I was coming to a thoroughly primitive place, but it seems there is a fashionable side to society in Proctor."

"Quite so," returned Miss Trowbridge, still a little stiffly.

"Well," sighed Susan, "I could not mix in it any way, even if I had some friend kind enough to introduce me. I've no gowns here but cotton and flannel."

She rattled on in her flippant strain, adroitly shaping the talk until, Miss Trowbridge thawing little by little, the conversation at last flowed on with its former freedom, and Phineas Thorne, entering the room a little later, interrupted a lively discussion as to the comparative merits of afternoon tea as dispensed in England and America.

Miss Trowbridge greeted the new-comer cordially. He shook hands with Irene with unembarrassed kindness.

"You are the young lady I met at the depot," he said; then he turned to Miss Farley, whose face had visibly clouded at his entrance.

"Don't feel in the least hurried, Susan," he said, seating himself. "We won't go home until you are quite ready."

"Oh, I do not like to keep you," she returned coldly. "I believe you are always tired."

"Mr. Thorne is a very hard-working man," observed Miss Trowbridge, turning a surprised look upon the speaker.

"Are you going to join Polly's cry?" asked Phineas, smiling. "I really do not deserve it." Then he turned to Irene. "Have you seen anything of Proctor yet, Miss Flanders?"

Irene responded by describing her afternoon drive, and Susan, turning a scornful shoulder, attempted to pursue her discussion with Miss Trowbridge.

"I think the difference in the flavor must be owing to the different degrees at which the water boils in the two countries," she said animatedly.

"Perhaps so," replied the other with a preoccupied air, her attention being given to the other conversation.

Susan pouted, drew herself up, and relapsed into silence, calling Bijou to her by a pat upon her lap.

Mr. Thorne began to speak of Irene's father, and the girl was so interested and asked so many eager questions that Susan had time to grow impatient before an opportunity came for departure.

At last the good-byes were said, and Miss Trow-

bridge and Irene stood at the door and watched the buggy move away.

"I like Mr. Thorne so much!" said Irene warmly.

"You well may," replied Miss Trowbridge; "and if you will excuse me for saying it of your friend, I fear Miss Farley has not sufficient sense to like him."

"You must make allowances for Susan, Miss Trowbridge," said Irene earnestly. "She has been so flattered, and petted, and spoiled. You see how pretty she is."

"Yes, as a delicate china shepherdess is pretty."

"I think there is much that is real and generous under the froth in Susan's nature," said Irene.

"Well," returned Miss Trowbridge, "a girl should realize that it is a very unwomanly thing to say that she has no interest in children!"

Irene smiled, and comprehended that Susan had indeed made a misstep which it would take time to retrieve.

Meanwhile that young woman, tucked comfortably into the buggy, addressed her silent companion.

"You must tell your sister that it was not I who detained you to-night," she said with a distinctly disagreeable accent.

Thorne's reply was, to say the least, unexpected.

"I suppose there are plenty of English sparrows in Chicago?" he said.

Susan was silent for a moment, undecided how to treat this diversion. At last she spoke briefly.

"Hosts."

"Then perhaps you will understand me when I say that you remind me of one of those pugnacious little creatures. Yes, I will tell Polly if she asks me."

Susan looked rigidly ahead of her. This man, so far her inferior, had dared to put her to ridicule. How could she show him his place once for all, and then keep him in it? It would not do to maintain silence and let him suppose her to feel reprimanded.

"Why need you go so far as Chicago for your similes?" she asked.

"I wanted to use one that you would be sure to understand."

"You seem to be under the impression that I am a child," said Susan, pulling one of Bijou's ears so that he uttered a little yelp of surprise. "I notice, for instance, that you call me by my first name."

Phineas made a creditable effort not to laugh, and succeeded. "Shall I call you Miss Farley hereafter?" he asked.

"I should suppose you would."

"I will try to remember," said Phineas, and at his

kind, indifferent tone Susan fumed again. She was conscious of a wish that he might see her in state, arrayed for a ball, surrounded by admirers, an acknowledged belle, and then she scorned herself for deigning to care even to crush him. He should not suppose her to be sulking. She would talk.

"This delightful horse of yours," she said condescendingly. "Couldn't I get some safe person to take me for a drive with her some day when you are not using her? Miss Flanders says the drives are fine about here."

"I never allow any one but myself to drive Jenny, but I will try to find time soon to take you if you like."

"Thank you, no," said Susan slowly and sweetly. "I suppose there is a livery stable here where I can get what I want."

"That depends on whether you are easily satisfied. It is a very poor stable. Polly has a safe horse, however. You can take him almost any time."

"Oh, thank you."

"I have trained this mare carefully. She hasn't a good temper naturally, and another person might come to grief with her, but there is also the danger that she might lose some of the good habits I have taught her, which would cause me great inconvenience. —

Hold, Jenny," continued Thorne, without raising his voice above the tone in which he had been speaking, and had it not been for the arm which he immediately extended before Susan, she would have been thrown against the dashboard, for the horse stopped instantly in its tracks.

Susan gave a little scream as she was jerked against her companion's arm.

"What did she do that for?" she asked angrily.

"That is one of the little tricks I spoke of."

"Then I'll thank you not to try them when I am in the buggy."

"I will not, except in case of necessity. Don't touch the reins;" and Phineas stepped down to the road, where, almost immediately before the horse, lay the prostrate figure of a man. He knelt down and listened to the sleeper's heavy breathing, then dragged the body to the side of the road. He next lit a pocket lantern and inspected the man's face, Susan watching with tense, startled interest, which changed to horror as she distinctly saw Thorne put his hand into first one and then another of the sleeper's pockets, and draw forth a pocket-book and a watch, which he transferred to his own coat. Then he deliberately blew out and pocketed the lantern and came back to the buggy. He sighed as he entered

and took up the reins. Jenny started on her quick gait. Susan was paralyzed into silence. Phineas heard her utter a kind of sob.

"I am sorry to have startled you so," he said, very kindly, "but Jenny would certainly have drawn a wheel over that poor fellow in half a minute more."

Susan looked around at him with horrified eyes.

"Would that have been any worse than your — your — taking his things?" burst from her irresistibly.

"It was the best I could do for him, all things considered," said Phineas with another sigh. "Isn't this passion for drink a strange, strange thing?"

"He was drunk, then!" exclaimed Susan.

"Oh, yes, it is poor Jenkins. His wife would suffer more if I took him home than she will if he does not appear, and the night is so mild it won't harm him to lie there."

Light began to dawn upon Susan. "So you are taking care of his things for him?" she said.

"Yes."

The girl felt like one released from nightmare. She laughed somewhat hysterically.

"Why? Did you think I added highway robbery to my other failings?"

"Oh, don't speak of it. I didn't understand. Tell

me some more about the horse. How do you stop her ordinarily when you don't want her to throw people out of the buggy?"

"So," replied Phineas, making some movement with the reins to which Jenny responded by moving more slowly, and then coming to a standstill, shaking her pretty head at the unusual request to stop for no reason in the middle of the street at this hour of the night.

"Do you like to travel, Jenny?" asked Phineas. The horse nodded her head energetically.

"How do you ask?"

Jenny whinnied gently.

"Go, then!" and at the word the animal sped away faster than before.

Susan laughed with pleasure. "Oh, how delightful!" she cried.

"Do you like to go fast?"

"As fast as this, yes."

"Would it frighten you to go faster?"

"Not if you said it was safe."

"Then I'll show you what my girl can do." Thorne dropped the reins around the dashboard and sent a soft, hissing sound through his teeth. The mare increased her speed until the pace was something terrific to Susan. She grasped Bijou with one hand,

and with the other clung to her companion's arm, who, as soon as as he felt this evidence of her agitation, reached for the reins, and Jenny, recognizing his touch, slowed her gait until it was normal.

"I feel as if I were in a sort of dream," gasped Susan.

"A pleasant one, I hope."

"I might make a pun and call it a nightmare; but I won't, for it *is* pleasant; however, you have shown me very good reasons for not wanting any one else to drive your horse, Mr. Thorne."

"I am glad of that, for I should be sorry to seem disobliging. After this, perhaps you will have sufficient confidence in my horsemanship to take that drive we spoke of, sometime."

A little later, when Phineas helped Susan out of the buggy, she was struck to perceive how vastly less scornful of him the events of the last half-hour had made her.

"He and his horse together make quite an interesting person, don't they, Bijou?" she asked just before going to sleep; and the spaniel's tail at the foot of the bed slapped the counterpane with an exhausted and sleepy sound.

CHAPTER VII.

YOUNG MAIDS.

IT surprised Irene to have her first week in Proctor slip by so swiftly. Already day by day the second week was going. It was high time for her to form a definite plan of action. The natural and pleasant thought was that she might find a boarding place in Proctor; but delicacy forbade her doing this, and although but four days remained of her fortnight, she had so far decided nothing.

She and Miss Trowbridge had in the mean time become excellent friends. The latter found her guest a good listener, always responsive and sympathetic when occasion demanded, and she liked the suggestion of grateful deference with which Irene always treated her.

They spent many hours of every day together, walking, driving, reading, Irene being always quick to observe and comply with her friend's wishes. She rejoiced in the liberty Miss Trowbridge gave

her to arrange the flowers every morning, and to dust the rare bric-à-brac. She, who had never known a home, was gaining more and more every day a home feeling here, very undesirable under the circumstances.

One morning, as she was putting the finishing touches to a bowl of geraniums, she sighed and turned toward her hostess who sat near by with some fancy work.

"I have heard it suggested, as a means of making time fly, to give one's note for thirty days," she said, "but I can add another. Come to make a visit at The Eyrie."

Miss Trowbridge smiled and looked up. "I am glad," she replied. "I have been only waiting for you to say something like that. I should be doubly lonely if you left me now, Irene, and if it seems pleasant to you — mind you, I mean if it seems really a pleasant idea to you — I should like to have you stay until I know definitely when Leo is coming home."

Irene looked undoubtedly handsome at that moment, and her soft brown eyes sparkled as they met the speaker's, but she hesitated. "I am afraid you think I have no place to go to," she said.

"My child, *I* am afraid I was thinking very little

about you," said the other with such evident sincerity that Irene crossed the room and kissed her.

"I am so happy to stay," she said; and thus it was settled.

Irene no longer counted the days, but enjoyed life in the happy June weather, finding novelty and delight where another would have seen only level monotony. Such an one was Susan Farley. She did not see Irene every day, and as Miss Thorne could not conceal a hostile attitude toward her little foibles, and as Phineas, whose soothing presence was always like oil upon the troubled waters, happened to be away from home a great deal just now, it went hard with poor Susan to kill time even with all the self-defensive weapons she had brought.

One day it had been unusually warm, and she was finding the low perch in an apple tree, which she had made a resort, less comfortable than usual. She thought of The Eyrie and its spacious, airy grounds, and the blue lake with its flashing wavelets, with a distinct sense of injury.

"If Miss Trowbridge had common decency," she thought, "she would invite me to spend a week with Irene, instead of giving me those grudging little visits. She is so stingy of Irene, anyway! She never even wants to let her come down here." Susan

flung back her head and looked listlessly up where a robin fluttered among the higher branches. The bird had for years built its nest in Susan's tree, and had at first been driven away by this visitor; but as the young woman persisted in adopting a nook there for her own, the robin by degrees came back, and his opinion of Susan, volubly expressed in bird-language, could it be translated into English, would probably be unfit for publication. He had long ceased to be afraid of her, as she paid very little attention to him, and his trusting mate was now brooding her last treasure of eggs for the season. Had Susan been an ardent bird-lover, it is doubtful if she could ever have come to be on her present terms of vixenish intimacy with the bird, but the robin's instinct assured him that her indifference was the safety of himself and family, and in their exchange of incivilities he was quite as fearless as she.

"Scold away, you ill-tempered thing," she remarked, as she caught his bright eye and he snapped his beak. "I do not go away because you want me to, but because this is Miss Trowbridge's nap time, and I have had a bright idea."

She slipped down out of the tree and moved toward the house, followed by the plaintive Bijou.

"Miss Thorne," she began brightly, entering where

Polly was sewing in her neat little room, "your brother said I might ask to take your horse and phaeton some day. Would it be convenient to-day?"

Polly raised her eyebrows in silent comment on this unwonted sweetness. "I've got to finish this work this afternoon," she said. "I don't know as I could go."

"Oh, I wouldn't trouble you for anything. Mr. Thorne said Major was quite safe, and I am used to driving. I thought I would get Miss Flanders to go with me."

"Well, you can take him. If you go around to the barn you'll find the boy, and he can harness up for you, or I'll go to the back door and call."

"Do not disturb yourself at all, Miss Polly. I can go just as well as not," replied Susan cheerfully, and she departed with alacrity.

Miss Thorne raised her eyebrows again as she went on with her work.

"Young Obadias,
David and Josias,
All were pious!"

she quoted dryly.

Twenty minutes later, Susan, with Bijou beside her, was driving Major Thorne along the village street. Major was well known in Proctor, and every

inch of Proctor was well known to him. He took the road to The Eyrie with nonchalant familiarity, and walked up the hill with rhythmical nods of his sagacious old head. Irene was lying in a hammock on the piazza when the phaeton approached. Susan had calculated rightly, Miss Trowbridge was asleep.

"I wonder if she would want me before we come back?" questioned Irene.

"Supposing she did," returned Susan. "It would only heighten her appreciation of you."

After a little hesitation, Irene left word with a servant, and the two girls set forth in high spirits. Major lumbered heavily down the hill while the friends laughed and talked, and arriving at the foot he turned of his own accord to the left.

"No, *no*," said Susan, pulling on the right rein. "We're not going to the Thornes'. Perish the thought!"

Major shook his head and showed a disposition to back, saying as distinctly as dumb show could do that when Miss Polly came down from The Eyrie she always went home.

"Not to-day, Major," said Susan, slapping him with the left rein and still pulling on the right. The old soldier succumbed reluctantly, and trotted away.

"Now this is a little more like living," said Susan

contentedly. "If I could only be with you more, Irene!"

"I wish we might be together oftener, but you ought to enjoy this beautiful air and sunshine, and all the time you have for reading, and sleeping, and studying. You look twice the girl you did when you came here."

"Oh, yes, I have a great appetite. Polly doesn't make very much out of me."

"How comes on the 'Meisterschaft'?"

"Tolerably; but after you've sat in an apple tree for two hours with the subjunctive mood and the crossest robin you ever heard of, why, even the 'Meisterschaft' palls."

"What a gloomy picture!" laughed Irene. "I hope you do not ruin your mother's peace of mind with your discontent."

"I have told her that I have the manuscript nearly finished for a book to be entitled 'Letters to a Mother by a Young Girl,' and that she will find in those all that I refrain from saying now."

"I am ashamed of you, Susan! If I could only make you as happy as I am!"

"Why in the world should you be happy," inquired Susan enviously, "with the prospect of being shut up alone with that old egotist for months to

come? How you must hate the very name of Leo Graham! If he were twice as handsome as his picture, it would afford no excuse for her. Polly has fortunately discovered that I am unfit to hear any more particulars concerning her idol."

"You ought not to call her Polly."

"Never mind the lecture, but tell me how you stand it."

"I certainly should not accept Miss Trowbridge's hospitality and then criticise it."

"Highly correct, my dear. The little dose is swallowed and assimilated. Now tell me, if you dare, your inmost thoughts concerning Miss Trowbridge's pet and joy."

"I think he is probably a very conceited young man. He would be superhuman if he were not, and I pity him."

Miss Farley dropped her head as though wilted.

"Irene, that does crush me," she said. "If you are so exalted as to find pity in your breast for that unconscionable bore, I will say no more until we find some common ground such as I am fit to tread on."

Irene absently traced the figures on the lap-robe. "Things are so comparative, Susan. If you had lived as I have, elbow to elbow with strangers, you would

know why I am happy. I do feel sorry for you, dear, but you would not like to pay the price that I have paid for the exceeding enjoyment I take in every minute here."

Her companion was silent for a time.

"And you never will be very happy," continued Irene, blushing very much and speaking timidly, "until you begin to try to see how much you can give instead of how much you can get."

Susan flushed and bridled. "You evidently think me a subject for missionary work," she said.

"I think you are discontented," returned Irene more courageously, "and I give you the benefit of the experience of many people."

Susan leaned across Bijou and rested her cheek for a second against Irene's shoulder. "I am not quite blind, dear," she said gently, "and I have seen that you practise what you preach."

Major had been trotting more and more slowly. He evidently realized the fact that it would be necessary to traverse as great a distance in returning as he travelled in this direction, and it therefore behooved him not to cover too much ground.

"Go on, you lazy thing!" said Susan, sitting up as he dropped into a leisurely walk. "There come a couple of young men," she added. "It is ages since

I have had a chance to make an impression, and you mustn't thwart me now, Major. Hold up your head and look stylish."

The road was narrow here, and the buggy containing the two young men came slowly on. It was a ramshackle affair drawn by a long-necked horse, but its occupants had been recognized by Susan's practised eye as out of keeping with their conveyance.

"Not Proctorites, Irene," she said in a low tone of conviction. "Probably summer residents, and this old poke won't move out of a walk, and I've no whip. Why, he's going slower and slower.— Go *on*!" this command accompanied by an impassioned slap of the reins, which Major noticed only by a whisk of his tail.

Susan sat up very straight and endeavored to give tone to the party by her own demeanor. Irene looked at the strangers, who were both smiling at her companion's impatience.

As they passed, the young man who was not driving gave Irene a mischievous glance and took their whip from its place. "Allow me," he said, and quickly touched Major with the whip. The horse sprang forward, and Susan colored more brightly.

"How ignominious!" she exclaimed, as her arms were pulled forward by the unexpected jerk.

"Why did you look so savagely at the horse, then?" asked Irene, laughing. "You appeared to be a damsel in distress, and that pale knight helped you out as well as he could."

"Was he pale? Here for his health, then, probably. I did not look at them when they passed. I meant to go by with a flourish."

"Which you did after all. So be consoled."

Major's swift spurt was soon over, and the girls turned toward home.

"I wish I could take you back with me to tea," said Susan ruefully.

"I will try to come soon," returned Irene, "if Miss Thorne will let me."

"She will let you if Miss Trowbridge consents."

"Oh, there will be no difficulty about that. I want to meet Mr. Thorne again. He is delightful. Surely you must enjoy him."

"I have not the least idea whether I do or not. He vexes me so I don't know what to do. He is so massive, and so sure of himself. Oh, I don't know how to describe him, — he is like a huge piece of granite, and I am the foam of a little wave that ripples against it."

Irene smiled. "The little wave wears the rock, remember."

The fates defend me from breaking against *him* for centuries!" returned Susan flippantly. "I would rather dance the german."

"You cannot dance the german in Proctor," said Irene seriously, "and you had better turn your attention to being happy as a bird here, doing what you can."

"Birds aren't particularly happy, so far as I have observed," replied Susan, disentangling Major's tail from the reins. "What would you have me do, for instance?"

"Help Miss Polly wash the dishes."

"The idea enchants me!"

"Yes, I supposed it would. I will tell you, Susan, what would be a good plan. Make a programme. Divide your day into half-hours. In the morning make your bed and dust your room. Help Miss Polly with the dishes"—

"When I pay my board!" exclaimed Susan indignantly.

"Most certainly. Did poor Miss Thorne advertise for boarders? Do you suppose you are a blessing to her? Well, that would take an hour. Then walk half an hour, read Ruskin half an hour, study German half an hour, do fancy work half an hour, lie down half an hour, and so on."

"I don't know but that I will try it," said Miss Farley dolefully. "I ought to part my hair in the middle, though, and brush it down over my ears and look meek and mild, and let my dress waists out in the back to make room for wings. They will be sure to sprout if I do all this."

"Well, you try it. I think there is plenty of time between now and the wing-period for us all," replied Irene.

By the time they reached the gates of The Eyrie, Susan seemed to have consented to take a more cheerful view of her lot. As the girls were about to begin the ascent of the hill, they were surprised to see descending the worn conveyance in which they had met the young men. Moses was sitting alone in it, and at sight of him Susan stopped Major and waited. Neither girl spoke. The same curiosity possessed both, but it was Susan who accosted the boy when he came near.

"Moses, whose buggy have you?"

"Depot man's," replied the ever-laconic Moses.

"But who came in it?"

"Mr. Leo."

A start from Irene and a little scream from Susan.

"Wait, Moses: who was with him?"

"Other feller he was going to Europe with."

"Why didn't they go?"

"Cause t'other man was sick, I guess; I dunno much about it."

"Come, come, Susan," urged Irene, "let him go."

Moses drove on, and the girls looked at each other in amaze as Major started.

"Do you suppose it was his august whip that smote our unworthy steed?" inquired Susan in an awed tone.

"No, I think it was 't'other man's.'"

"Talk about special dispensations!" continued Susan solemnly. "Irene, we are in the most colossal luck. It will depend largely upon the enterprise of these young men whether or no I have to make that odious programme."

Irene looked somewhat dazed. She was silent for a time, then she spoke quietly.

"Well, this may seem very delightful to you, but it is very hard for me."

"Why? I am greener than ever with envy of you."

"Don't you see that now Othello's occupation is gone?"

"I should say it had just commenced. What do you mean?"

"My invitation to stay here was distinctly until

Miss Trowbridge should know when Leo would come home."

"She would not be outrageous enough to retract her invitation," said Susan indignantly.

"Nor would I be outrageous enough to hold her to it."

"Now, do let well-enough alone," said Susan coaxingly. "Be generous, and give the woman the benefit of the doubt. She may be as hospitable as you or I would be under the circumstances. Wait and see."

Susan looked with some longing at the gray walls of the house as Irene disappeared within it. She had gained an insight into Miss Trowbridge's jealousy, which she knew Irene was too broad-minded to suspect; but she was far too astute to suggest anything which would tend to persuade Irene to take her departure, and she trusted that her friend's obtuseness would continue for a long time to come.

CHAPTER VIII.

LEO.

IRENE hesitated whether to go into the parlor, where she could hear voices, or to go up to her room. Already she felt a painful sense of being deposed. Miss Trowbridge had been used to miss her when she went out and to welcome her when she returned; but now — "superfluous again," thought Irene sadly. Suddenly deciding to go to her room, she had reached the foot of the stairs when Miss Trowbridge pushed aside a portière and appeared. Her eyes were red, a bright spot glowed on either cheek; she was still under evident excitement.

"Come in, Irene," she said, "my dear boy has come home." She took Irene by the hand and led her into the room, where stood a tall young fellow with light hair and moustache, and a slight, dark man, whose pale face Irene remembered bright with amusement awhile ago when he had touched Major

with the whip, and who, after Leo had been proudly presented, was introduced to her as Mr. Layton.

"Your fame has preceded you, Miss Flanders," said Graham.

Irene smiled as she thought how truthfully she might return the compliment.

"Aunt Emma has been telling us how much you have been to her in the last month, and that you are to be one of us through the summer."

Miss Trowbridge's look of surprise and anxiety at this fortunately escaped Irene. "And I assure you it is very pleasant news," finished Graham.

"Every day here has been a delight," returned Irene simply; "but if you are going to remain now, Miss Trowbridge will not have need of me."

"Why couldn't she have waited until we were alone to say that?" thought Miss Trowbridge; "then I should have known how to turn it to account;" but her silence was not noted in the shower of polite protestations uttered by the young men, and she knew Irene well enough by this time to exonerate her from any lack of simplicity in uttering her thought as it rose to her lips.

"You have been ill, Mr. Layton?" said the girl, turning to him.

"Yes, I played a shabby trick on my friend here,

not only depriving him of his summer's trip, but allowing him to play sick-nurse to me as well." Mr. Layton had very expressive eyes with long lashes, and he used them with an effect of devotion when he talked.

"And now I have brought him here to recruit, Miss Flanders," said Leo.

"There is no better place, I am sure," replied Irene, again feeling happy and secure, and looking from one to the other of the young men with the soft geniality that had developed in her under this roof. "I am so glad for you!" she added, turning to her hostess.

"Thank you. Now we will let you go to your room, child. I only wanted you to see my boy first."

Her boy rose and bowed with easy grace as Irene obediently left the parlor.

"You must lie down, Layton," he said, turning to his friend then.

"I no more need to lie down than you do," replied the other with some impatience.

"What! Rebellion!" exclaimed Leo dramatically, and striding across the room he caught Layton up in his arms and stepped with him out of a long window which opened upon the spacious piazza. Layton waved his hand above his friend's shoulder. "Farewell, Miss Trowbridge, you will bear me witness that

I did not leave you so informally of my own accord."

Graham deposited his burden in a hammock, and then made a gesture toward the lawn. "I call upon *you* to observe that you will not hear one defiant note here from a mosquito."

"Bite and say nothing about it, eh?" returned the other, swinging lazily. Leo placed a cushion more comfortably beneath his friend's head, and then stretched himself in a reclining-chair. Layton took from his pocket a small sketch block and a pencil, and began to draw. Presently he tore off the sheet and passed it over his head to his friend, who was silently enjoying the familiar view. Graham took it and smiled as he gazed. It was a sketch of a girl's face with rounded chin and full lips, a forehead about which the hair grew thickly, and from which it was carried loosely back to a knot at the back of the head. It was a classical face, yet easily recognizable as the face of Irene Flanders.

"You have hit it, as usual," said Leo; and his friend, like a person who had eased his mind of a necessary duty, slipped block and pencil back into his pocket, and gave himself up to rest in the fragrant summer air.

Miss Trowbridge, in the joyous excitement of her

first interview with her returned nephew, had admitted that she had asked Irene to continue her stay indefinitely, under the supposition that Leo's absence would be prolonged, and she had failed to add that her intention would be decidedly altered by his return. His repetition of her remark placed her in a difficult position. Had he said nothing, Irene would have been sure to say to the aunt what she had said to the nephew, and the hostess would have been able to convey her assent to a change of plan in a way that would not cause any offence. Her intelligence told her that she had no reasonable ground for vexation with her guest, yet vexed she felt when Irene, with her usual happy face, appeared at the table that evening. She had for an hour past been talking with Leo, and Miss Trowbridge looked at her critically, and with a dash of suspicion in her gaze. Irene wore a simple white dress, one she had often worn since her arrival. Miss Trowbridge sought in vain for any extra trinket or ribbon which might indicate a new desire to please. The girl, happily unconscious of criticism, responded vivaciously to Leo's questioning as to the manner in which she had spent her time in Proctor, the young man watching her with growing interest as she gave her simple, vivid de-

scriptions. When she finished, he looked across at his aunt, quietly challenging her admiration.

"All I can say, Miss Flanders," he returned, "is that you must have a touch equal to that of Midas for transforming dull surroundings into matters of interest and amusement."

Miss Trowbridge looked displeased. "You never told me you thought Proctor dull, Leo."

"Indeed I do not. Every stick and stone on this old place is a friend; but Miss Flanders has none of my reasons, or of yours either, Aunt Emma, for finding pleasure here. I insist that she is a very wonderful young lady."

"Well, there is no reason *now* why she should remain a day longer than she likes," said Miss Trowbridge, not finding quite the courage to lift her eyes as she made the remark.

Irene thought the speaker was hurt. "Miss Trowbridge knows how unforced my enjoyment has been and will be as long as I stay," she said warmly. Philip Layton observed the shade that fell across the hostess' face at this, and saw also how honest and unsuspicious Irene was.

"Well, it is an ideal place for me, surely," he said; "so you see, Miss Trowbridge, how completely united and content a party you have gathered about

you. Do you usually spend the entire summer here?"

"Very seldom. Leo and I both like the sea, and we go about from place to place in the most independent manner in the summer time. The Eyrie is home to us, but we live much of the year in hotels. Of course we like to be in the city the greater part of the winter." Here a sudden idea came to the speaker, bringing comfort with it. She did not at all like the pleased expression with which her nephew's eyes continually sought Irene's fair face. The girl had evidently settled down upon the idea that her summer plan should be undisturbed. Now Miss Trowbridge thought she saw a way out. "I suspect a quiet spot by the salt water would be more invigorating for you, Mr. Layton, than this," she continued. "I think, after you have rested here a few days, we had better try it. What do you suggest, Leo?"

"I think people should live by the day in summer. Don't fatigue us, Aunt Emma, by making plans on the very evening of our arrival;" then he turned back to Irene, to whom he had been talking. "To think you have not been in a boat since you came here!" he said. "We will visit the boat-house immediately. Layton, you cannot come. The doctor's orders, remember. Aunt Emma, you might come, only then

Layton would be left alone, and that we cannot allow, of course; so *au revoir*. I promise to bring Miss Flanders back safe and sound in half an hour or so."

Irene turned toward her hostess. "We have a commanding officer now, it seems," she said lightly.

Philip Layton rose to draw back Miss Trowbridge's chair. "Go with them, please," he urged. "It is too bad for you to be deprived of Leo's society a minute of this first evening."

"Nonsense!" said the latter. "I want you two to become acquainted; so do not interfere, Layton;" and Leo disappeared with Irene, who had at last perceived her hostess' disturbed look.

"I think your aunt is not pleased to have you leave her," she said as they moved down the steps. She had lost the first awe of her companion, induced by seeing him so large and apparently so dignified.

"We will not be gone long," he returned carelessly.

"At any rate, it is she who has spoiled you," said Irene.

Graham smiled. "It seems to me you are a little hasty in deciding that I am spoiled."

"Hasty? No, indeed. I know all about you," said Irene demurely.

"By my aunt's disclosures?"

The girl nodded.

Leo smiled. "In that case I throw off all disguise," he said, with an expansive gesture. "I might have assumed to have some imperfections of mind or body, to be ignorant on some deep and abstruse questions, to have some failings in disposition or heart; but I see it would be useless now to try to impose upon you, since you have been behind the scenes and know me for the perfect being I am!"

His tone was irresistibly absurd, and Irene laughed.

"And still you have enjoyed life at The Eyrie. What a charming disposition you must have! To tell the truth," he continued seriously, looking at her, "you pique my curiosity wonderfully. You cannot have led the ordinary life of a young lady and yet find such delight as you declare you have found here."

Irene raised her eyebrows. "Do you always think aloud, Mr. Graham?" she asked.

Leo regarded her quizzically, and shook his head slowly. "You shouldn't snub perfect beings, Miss Flanders. Well," he continued, light-heartedly, "you will tell me about yourself some time. Here we are at the boat-house."

It was a very complete affair, an ornamental little building with a platform projecting out into the water. Graham unlocked the door at the back, and

ushered Irene in. She gave an admiring exclamation at the sight that met her eyes. There was a steam launch with polished nickel trimmings, a sail boat, a trim outrigged working boat, and a canoe, the first two afloat below, and the latter hanging in mid air, suspended from the ceiling. Against the walls hung fishing tackle, flags, bathing suits, masts, sails, and all the paraphernalia dear to the amateur boatman's heart.

"You do not know anything about boating?" repeated Graham in reply to his companion's remark. "You shall not be able to say that a month hence. I will make a sailor of you, and more than that, I will teach you to paddle your own canoe."

"I don't know," said Irene, looking doubtfully at the frail craft.

"Oh, you will like it immensely. Never fear."

They came out on the little platform and sat down on one of the seats which stretched across either end. It was a still evening, and the water rippled quietly against the wooden supports. Graham took advantage of his companion's rapt study of the sunset colors to gaze with equal attention into her unusual face.

"The more I think of it, the more strange it seems

that Aunt Emma has never spoken of you to me," he said, when she surprised him in his investigation.

"It is not strange. She did not know me until after you went away."

"Well, who are you, please?"

Irene smiled at the boyish imperiousness of the question.

"Miss Trowbridge can tell you all about me," she replied, faintly blushing. She wondered if Leo knew the romance of his aunt's life.

"But I prefer to have it from your own lips. Shall I tell you first what you seem to me?" Graham leaned forward with an eager yet whimsical expression, as if his fancy attracted him while he ridiculed it. "You seem like a maiden who, after I left The Eyrie, might have sprung from the lake full grown, like Aphrodite from the foam. You seem so lacking in worldly wisdom, so inexperienced. You seem to look upon life with fresh, unspoiled eyes, to find a joy in this tame existence wholly disproportionate to its deserts. I go away never having heard of such a person as yourself, and come back in a few weeks to find you domiciled here, as familiar as myself with the resources of the place, and asking for nothing better in all the range of pleasure than to remain here, if need be, in solitude."

Irene slowly flushed over all her face and throat while he spoke. "I am no such interesting personage," she said in a low voice. "Far from springing from this delicious cool water, I have come from New York's hot pavements; but after that your guess is near to the truth. I have had singular experiences and lack of experiences. I feel that I never really lived till I came here."

The pained tone in her voice rebuked her companion, who felt more than ever mystified, but kept silence.

"My father," she continued after a little, "is Richard Flanders, who was an old friend of Miss Trowbridge's."

"The man who ill-treated her," said Graham quickly.

"Now you will not like me," said Irene impulsively.

"Forgive me," returned the other. "I can understand, then, that you have not led a happy life with him. So Aunt Emma invited you here?"

"Of course; but I will go away again if you think I ought to."

"Why should you? I certainly do not think so."

"I feared when I first came," — began Irene, and stopped herself, blushing violently.

"What did you think? Tell me."

"No, no. I, too, was thinking aloud.

"Yes, tell me. Let us be frank with each other. You must not begin now to assume the discretion of an experienced damsel."

"I have since found that it was an impertinent thought," said Irene, "but I could not discover any other motive for her inviting me"—

"Yes?" remarked Graham, encouragingly.

"I must be dreaming!" exclaimed Irene. "It is getting dark, and one always is led to make confessions in the dark that in the daylight one would be wise enough to repress."

"I see," said Leo. "You thought Aunt Emma might remember her lover with some tenderness."

Irene was silent.

"No, there was nothing of that in her motive."

"Oh, I found that out very soon," exclaimed the girl. "Was she not kindness itself to bring me here? And now that she is no longer lonely, to think that she wishes me to stay on! I love her for it. I never can show her enough gratitude."

Leo was touched by her earnestness and by her intense tone. "I am sure you have been more to her then she hoped," he returned. "It is no wonder she wishes to keep you."

"And now I am selfishly depriving her of you!" exclaimed Irene, starting to her feet. "She expected us to come directly back. We must go."

Graham rose, but did not move away at once. "I like our first talk together," he said; "I believe we are going to be good friends."

"I shall be glad if we are," returned the girl, looking at him musingly. "I have never talked so long before with any man."

"Really?" said Leo, incredulously.

"Yes, it is true," replied Irene, sighing at her retrospect.

"You *are* the maiden of the lake!" he observed with conviction; "and as such I cannot prefix a Miss to your name. It would be too shockingly conventional."

"I do not think I shall object if you say Irene," she returned composedly.

"Let us try it. Irene, my 'Lady of the Lake,' do you find yourself objecting?"

"N-no."

"Then shake hands on it." He held out both hands and she put hers into them. Then they returned through the boat-house, and he helped her up the steep and stony path.

Miss Trowbridge was walking up and down the

piazza alone, when they reached the house. As soon as she distinguished their figures in the shadow, she halted.

"You have not kept your word," she said, in a voice that was unsteady. "You stayed too long."

"It was my fault, wholly, Miss Trowbridge," said Irene eagerly. "We fell to talking and forgot."

They fell to talking and forgot! The words roused Emma Trowbridge's jealous fears and resentment. That was the way it would often be if Irene stayed here. They would often fall to talking and forget.

"You had better go in and entertain Mr. Layton," she said to Irene; and the girl, all sorrow that her kind friend should have felt a slight, obeyed. Miss Trowbridge clasped both hands around her nephew's arm as he came and stood beside her.

"This is not going to do," she said, still choked by her angry emotion.

Leo also felt stirred, but more than ever strong and sure of himself. "Do you mean that you do not wish me to take any more evening walks with Miss Flanders? — because I mean to do so as often as she will let me."

Miss Trowbridge started. It was the easy-going

young fellow's first positive rebellion. She leaned less heavily on his arm.

"Then I will see that you do not have opportunity. She shall go away to-morrow."

"Then so shall I."

"Where?"

"I have not the least idea; but when that innocent, happy girl is driven away from here on my account, I go too. Aunt Emma, you sent for her to gratify a whim, but you must have a better reason for sending her away. Now let us both be reasonable. Tell me all your thoughts in the matter. What are you afraid of?"

Miss Trowbridge dropped her nephew's arm and stood with both her hands lifted and resting on his broad shoulders.

"Leo, my darling," she said, "some day a dreadful thing is going to happen to me."

He clasped his arms around her in genuine alarm.

"What do you mean? Are you in danger? Have you some reason to fear a sudden calamity?"

"No, my child," she returned, tenderly, happy in his embrace. "I mean that you are going to fall in love."

The young fellow threw back his head and gave a

spontaneous laugh, which was sufficient assurance of his present heart-whole condition.

"And if I do," he said seriously, after a minute, "are you afraid I shall cease to love you? Don't you know, Aunt Emma, that when a man loves a woman nobly and truly he has gained more capacity for loving his friends?"

"Until that woman comes, I wish to be first," said the other feelingly.

"And so you are, indeed," replied Leo, kissing her; "your place will never be changed."

"Then I am not in the first place now?"

Graham hesitated. "No," he said gently, holding her closely, "I suppose not."

She gave a sort of sob and drew away from him. He waited in silence, and at last she spoke again.

"Half of the wretched and finally broken engagements, and most of the unhappy marriages, come originally from propinquity," she said. "I have always tried to oversee and guard you, Leo, and all my better judgment rebels now against keeping a young and attractive girl in the house with you. It is shameful," she added, brokenly, "that you should defy me in this matter. I am older and wiser than you. I know the danger that you ridicule. It would be wrong, degrading, if you were to engage yourself

to a girl merely because you are much with her; yet every day men make that mistake."

"My dear aunt! Your fears outrun your good sense."

"Give me your permission, Leo," she persisted, eagerly, "to manage this affair as I think best."

"I will never consent to Irene's being driven away from Proctor on any pretext whatever. Why, just think how you are wronging her by this talk! She is as high as the stars above every thought of the kind. Shall I take Layton and go away?" he finished abruptly.

"No, no, — at least not yet. I will think. I will think."

"And in your thinking, be kind, Aunt Emma. Put yourself in the place of this young girl you have made so happy," he returned earnestly. "She has no mother, and, I should think, few friends."

"Oh, Leo!" exclaimed his aunt, panic-stricken, "you pity her, and that frightens me, for pity is akin to" —

"Stop!" interrupted the other indignantly. "Is it because she is alone that you and I have the right to talk about her in this way? It is a cowardly business, then. She is as pure and frank as a field-daisy, and her affections are holy ground, not a tract

to be coolly examined and taken or rejected at will." He spoke in a hushed, intense voice, as though fearful of being overheard, and his companion trembled before him. "Be careful what you do or say to her, Aunt Emma," he said, after an instant's silence. Then, as she did not respond, he turned and left the piazza.

CHAPTER IX.

THE APPLE TREE.

THE next morning Miss Trowbridge was most unwillingly confined to her room by a severe headache, and Irene was obliged to do the honors of the breakfast table. Graham came down stairs in a morose and vaguely sore state of mind, as uncomfortable as it was unusual. Layton soon appeared, rather weary-eyed and languid, after the manner of convalescents before the day is well aired, and Irene was conscious of the heavy sphere of depression, and felt humbly the full responsibility of lightening it.

She did not know how potent a factor her appearance was in helping matters. Her fresh smooth skin looked fine and fair in the morning light, framed in the soft dark hair that was gathered back with such natural simplicity. She wore a pale pink morning dress which she had made since she came to Proctor, and nothing could have become her better than the

narrow lace which trimmed its open throat. Her eyes rested earnestly on first one and then the other of the young men as they took their places at table.

"I am afraid you did not rest well," she said timidly. This Leo was so different from the one of the night before that she felt disappointed.

Layton forced a smile. "Do you not know the one topic that Emerson says is 'peremptorily forbidden to all well-bred, to all rational mortals, namely, their distempers'? He says, 'If you have not slept or if you have a headache,' you must 'hold your peace and not pollute the morning, to which all the house-mates bring serene and pleasant thoughts,' by groans. So do not tempt us, Miss Flanders, to disturb your evident serenity."

"Mr. Graham, are your thoughts serene and pleasant?" asked Irene, a trifle mischievously.

Leo roused himself; but he could not think of any witty rejoinder. "Not very, I am afraid," he replied briefly.

"Well," said Irene, shaking her head seriously as she passed them their coffee, "I warn you I am studying character; I am finding out what men are like in the morning in their own homes."

Her two companions looked up. Leo smiled and frowned at once. "Layton, there is something un-

canny about this young woman," he said. "Have you suspected the fact that she was born but a few weeks ago?"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Layton. "What a precocious child."

"Not entirely," replied Graham, "even rather backward in some things."

Irene laughed softly. "No," she said, with a pretty, confiding air, "I will tell you. I know the men of boarding-houses, — rather greedy, very hurried, and usually preoccupied; the most agreeable ones are those who are not socially inclined; but I do not know men at home."

"Then you do not know them at all," said Leo.

"Precisely. I told you so last night," returned the girl composedly. "I made up my mind at once to study you both."

Layton and Graham exchanged a look of comical dismay and then laughed. "Lucky morning she has chosen, isn't it?" said the latter, the incomprehensible hurt within him beginning to be soothed. "Let us wipe off the slate and begin fresh. — Will you?" turning to Irene.

"Yes," she answered, rather doubtfully; "but I do not want to be misled."

"Misled! Not for worlds. Layton and I are a

pair of domestic, transparent creatures. You will observe that we have just entered the dining-room. Ah, *good*-morning, Miss Flanders!" he began effusively. "Layton, old fellow, I am delighted to see you looking so well."

"Thanks," returned Layton with equal cordiality; "and you, my dear Miss Flanders, if I may speak of it, how altogether appropriate your rosy costume is to the season!"

Irene laid down her knife and fork and looked at him seriously; but before she could reply, Graham broke in.

"Now what are we going to do to amuse you today, miladi; do you ride?" Irene turned her eyes to him.

"Or," continued Layton, "shall we have out the carriage?" Irene looked back at the last speaker.

"What do you say to a picnic?" exclaimed Leo jovially.

"Or a *dolce far niente* day on the lake?" suggested Layton enthusiastically.

"I know where to cut the very roses for your hair and dress," said Leo. "The instant we have finished breakfast I shall get them. You will please me by wearing them?"

"Can I not read aloud a poem or a story to speed

the morning for you?" begged Layton.

"Hush, both of you!" said Irene imperiously.

"Miss Flanders!" in reproachful unison.

"This is merely a play," said the girl.

"Not at all," returned Layton gravely; "just the ordinary breakfast-table talk of family men to the ladies of their family."

"It is very nice, then," said Irene demurely.

"We felt sure you would like us when you really knew us," replied Leo modestly.

"Well, I will take all the things you have offered, one by one."

Both young men dropped their hands, leaned back in their chairs, and groaned.

Irene raised her eyebrows. "Is it not the rôle of the ladies of the family to accept?"

"Very seldom," replied Layton soberly. "When they do, it sometimes happens that they are disappointed."

"*I* do not allow any shams," said Irene firmly. "I accept your offers."

"Ah, that is another thing you will have to learn in the great world," said Graham, leaning forward in serious explanation. "It is not customary for a young lady to accept the offers of two men at the

same time — at least not in each other's hearing. I may say it is never done."

"This pleasantry will not serve you," said Irene, as they rose from the table. The young men followed her into the adjoining room. "Let me see," she said deliberately; "I think it shall be a row on the lake first. — Oh!" with a startled exclamation, turning and facing her hearers, "there is poor little Susan."

"Where?"

"Down in the hot village. It seems cruel to have such a good time without her."

"Some one you have met here?" asked Graham.

"No, a Chicago girl I knew at school. She is spending the summer at the Thornes'."

"And finds Proctor as charming as you do?"

"Oh, no," Irene replied promptly, adding slowly, with a little smile, "Susan was not born yesterday."

"What do you mean?" asked Graham anxiously. "If you mean by that that she is an — well, an old girl, wouldn't it be as well to — er — skip Susan?"

"Thank you! How could she be an old girl and have been to school with me?"

"Because, if you have ever been to school, it must have occurred in a previous incarnation," replied

Graham, "and that would make her a decidedly old girl, wouldn't it?"

"Does this carping often occur among gentlemen at home?" inquired Irene with dignity. "I thought I said I wanted Susan."

Layton shook his head mournfully at Graham. "Leo," he said meekly, "I think Susan goes."

"Can we all go together to get her?" asked Irene joyfully.

"Do you hear that, Phil?" asked Leo with a crushed air. "Was ever such grim sarcasm! She, the lady of our family, the arbiter of our daily destiny, asks if we can all go together to get Susan!"

"Then the drive will come before the boat-ride!" exclaimed the girl; "and I will go immediately, and be ready by the time the horses are. You do not think, Mr. Graham," turning to him anxiously, "that Miss Trowbridge could object?"

Leo had very positive ideas on the subject, but he kept them to himself. "My liege lady," he replied, "my Aunt Emma used to wish she could give me the moon. Do you suppose she could deny me Susan?"

"Her name is Farley — Miss Farley," said Irene suggestively.

Graham bowed. "Miss Farley. The venerable Miss Farley," he replied obediently. "'Susan' sug-

gests corkscrew curls on each side of the face. Does she wear corkscrew curls?"

"Hello!" exclaimed Layton, under the inspiration of a bright idea. "It is the young lady who was driving with you yesterday."

"Yes, certainly," said Irene.

"Those horses must be hurried up," observed Layton with determination.

Poor Miss Trowbridge, still the victim of severe pain, lay in her darkened room and heard the sound of wheels. She heard her nephew's laugh. She longed to know what was going forward, but it was physical misery to think. She consoled herself with the recollection that "three is a crowd," and that Leo would not be likely to separate himself from Philip Layton to-day. She would say something to Irene to ensure her remaining within call. She rang the bell and a maid appeared.

"Ask Miss Flanders to come here."

"Miss Flanders has just driven off in the two-seated phaeton with Mr. Leo and his friend. She asked if she might see you, and I advised her not to come in."

Miss Trowbridge groaned and turned her face away. The maid retreated, mentally grumbling.

"There's no telling what'll please a woman with the headache," she thought.

Miss Farley had risen that morning with the commendable intention of following Irene's advice in the pursuit of happiness. Phineas and his sister were at the breakfast table when she entered the dining-room. Miss Polly always pursed up her lips when she said good-morning upon her boarder's entrance, but her brother always welcomed the girl with a kind nod and smile. They both noticed that Susan looked brighter than usual this morning.

"Proctor is treating you well, Susan," said Phineas, looking approvingly at her delicately colored cheeks. "It will be a pleasure to give you into your mother's hands so strong and rosy."

Susan smiled condescendingly at this. She liked admiration, even from Phineas Thorne.

"We can take that drive to-day, if you like. I have to go ten miles through a very pretty bit of country, and shall be glad to have you come with me."

"Good! I have been longing to drive behind Jenny again."

"Then we will go directly after dinner."

"I will be ready. Did Miss Polly tell you that Miss Trowbridge's nephew has come home?"

"No, I forgot it," remarked Polly.

"Well, he has, and he has brought the friend with him with whom he had expected to go abroad."

"I'll be bound Emma Trowbridge had a hysterical fit," observed Miss Thorne.

"What kind of a fellow *is* her nephew?" asked Susan.

"The best sort," replied Phineas.

"Leo is a remarkable young man," added his sister.

"Do *you* like him, Miss Polly?" asked Susan in innocent amazement. "I thought you did not like any one but Mr. Thorne."

Polly cast a look of dislike at the speaker, and Phineas saw it. He stopped to speak to Susan a little later when he passed out of the house. She was having a frolic with Bijou in the grass, and looking very childish in her blue and white chintz dress.

He spoke her name in a grave tone, and she looked up, her face flushed, and her curly hair blowing about her forehead.

"Do you think it would do the least good to lecture you, Susan?" he asked.

"Probably not," she returned breathlessly, while Bijou continued his mad gallop, his ears swinging

like black ringlets each side of his face. The girl fell into a sitting posture and leaned her weight against the ground upon one hand. "I'll just inform you, if you didn't know it, that I am being very good to-day — or, that is, I am going to be, and I do not deserve any lecture."

"A few minutes ago you spoke unpleasantly to Polly. I notice that you do it often, and I beg you to be more careful of her feelings."

"Indeed?" returned Susan. "Is this the way you ordinarily talk to your summer boarders?"

Phineas looked at her with his peculiar, smiling gaze, which always, in the midst of her impertinence, had power to bring the color tingling to her cheeks. "We never tried summer boarders until this year," he said, "and even now the plural number is not appropriate; we have only one singular little party."

"Who nevertheless *is* a boarder, and independent," retorted Susan.

Phineas shook his head slowly. "But who will have to pay her board to some other deserving family unless she can be agreeable," he replied, "I cannot have my Polly made unhappy even to oblige your mother. You have been a spoiled child all your life, Susan. Don't you think you are old enough now to take your own training in hand?"

"Surely it is hardly worth while," spoke Susan, looking at him with bright, angry eyes, "when you are right here, so able and willing to do it for me."

"Yes, I am able and willing, and only wait for your permission." His voice was so kind that in spite of herself tears sprang into her eyes and quenched their fire. "If you knew what I had been just about to do," she said, profoundly injured, "you would be covered with mortification for scolding me so."

"What had you been intending to do?"

"Help Miss Polly wash the dishes," replied Susan impressively.

Phineas could not help smiling, but he nodded his head approvingly. "A very kind thought," he said. "Good, fussy Polly would probably trust your dainty fingers, but I cannot induce her to employ a servant. Be her friend, Susan, and let her be yours. You will find her the truest, kindest woman in the world."

Susan looked rather mournful, and he fancied a little pale. "I was happy a few minutes ago. Why need you have spoiled it all?" she said. "I am always lonely and bored here, and it is not particularly generous in you to remind me that I am here on tolerance."

"I am sorry for you," he returned more coldly

than she had ever heard him speak. "We give you our best. I am very sorry you find it so poor," and he walked down the path toward the gate, outside which his buggy waited.

Susan was seized with remorse. She rose from the grass and hurried after him. "Mr. Thorne," she said gently. He turned, and she saw that his face was flushed. "I am sorry if I was stupid enough to say anything to hurt your feelings."

Phineas took her hands in his. "Susan, you haven't in the world a better friend than I," he said. "If I have said anything unjust, forgive me; but — be kind to Polly."

Susan pouted under his searching eyes, and swung his hands from side to side childishly. "You think a great deal more about her part than you do about mine," she said.

"I hope I do; I ought to. But it makes me wretched to think of you as being unhappy here."

"And that is why you are going to take me to drive," replied Susan, pulling her hands away, with a gay change of mood. "Dear old Jenny!" patting the horse. "Does she like sugar?"

"Yes; but I mustn't wait now. You shall give her some when I come home at noon. Good-by

until then," and Phineas jumped into the buggy and was off.

And Susan. Her next step, in all honesty, should have been to the kitchen door to proffer her humble assistance; but her familiar leafy retreat was shady and cool, and the kitchen was hot, and she drifted toward the pleasant alternative as she had done all her life. In a minute more the robin and his wife were condoling with one another over her arrival in the apple tree.

By some subtle reasoning, logical to her mind, the reproaches she had suffered from Phineas took the place of the effort she had intended to expend on Miss Polly's china, and not a pang of conscience afflicted her as she nestled into the most comfortable position the tree afforded, resting her feet against a bough still lower than that in which she sat, and enjoying her indolence to the full. She had not remained in her rustic seat long enough to be tired of it, when she saw approaching through the trees the figure of a man, who raised his hat as he came near.

"Good-morning, Miss Farley," he said in an assured tone. "When Miss Flanders told me that you were to be found in an apple tree, I begged to be allowed to be the one to search you out, believing you would excuse the intrusion for old acquaintance' sake."

Susan's eyes, wide with surprise, but by no means displeased, stared at the speaker; but she did not drop from her perch. "I am not sorry to be intruded upon," she returned coolly, "but I never saw you before, I believe."

"Look again," said Layton, coming and leaning against her foot-rest. "I knew you as soon as I saw you — that is, I knew I had seen you, though I could not remember where. Now do return the compliment."

Susan looked at him more curiously. "I suppose you are Mr. Graham's friend, or you would not be speaking of Miss Flanders. So it was you who whipped the horse for me? Is that the old acquaintance you refer to?"

"Oh, Miss Farley, you have no idea how you are humiliating me. Where were you a year ago now?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Susan eagerly. "Why, of course! *Table d'hôte* in Venice. But you have changed. You have shaved your beard. You are thinner."

"Thank you, thank you. Now you are more soothing. If you have forgotten my name, break it to me gently."

"Did you remember my name?" asked Susan de-

fiantly. "Did not Miss Flanders have to tell it to you?"

"Well, we won't say anything about that," returned the other. "My name is Philip Layton."

"Yes, and you are an artist," declared the girl triumphantly.

"Many thanks," replied Layton. "It is pleasant to hear it stated with so much conviction. Please promise at once that you will let me sketch you in this bower."

"That would depend on how long you would want me to keep still; yet Proctor has reduced me to consenting to almost anything."

Layton looked at her with the adoring expression which it was so easy for him to assume. "You have a true love of nature, I can see, to have made this your retreat, with no companionship but that of the birds."

"Would you like to include my companions in your sketch?" inquired Susan ironically. "Do you hear those little dears above there?" The young robins had heard the note of the parent bird, arrested in its errand of bringing food by fear of Philip, and were stretching up bald, unsteady heads, and opening their beaks to an incredible width as they uttered piercing cries of hunger.

"What fine, open countenances!" laughed Layton. "No, I'm afraid I have not sufficient paper to include your companions."

Susan shrugged her shoulders. "I do not like nature," she remarked, "but I like to be cool, and this is better than the house."

"I am forgetting my errand," said Layton. "Graham and Miss Flanders are waiting in the carriage. We have come to carry you off to The Eyrie for the day. Will you come?"

Susan dropped lightly from the tree, her face wreathed in smiles. "Will I come?" she repeated. "Why, The Eyrie has been my oasis since I came here."

"I hope our return will not lessen its attractiveness," said Layton.

Susan laughed at his tender glance. "I expect your return to enhance it," she returned, walking away at a hurried pace. She left Philip at the door of the house, and went in to get her hat and gloves and a little wrap.

She paused a moment in the kitchen, where Polly was singing at her work.

"Miss Thorne, I am going to The Eyrie to spend the day," she said briefly. "You need not send for me if I do not come home to tea."

Polly's song stopped, and she looked after the retreating figure with only a quiet "Very well."

There was something intensely aggravating about the treatment she received from the arrogant, spoiled child, of whom she had self-denyingly consented to take charge, and she had not the tact or adaptability to improve matters. Her curiosity urged her now to a window which commanded a view of the street, and there she could see the carriage and its occupants. Scarcely had the sound of wheels died away when Susan's little spaniel came whining and running into the room.

"Left you behind, has she?" asked Polly sharply, —"and *Phineas!*" she added in a shocked tone. "She promised to go to ride with him this noon, and when these folks invited her, she never gave him a second thought." Polly stood in reverie, too indignant for words. Bijou came and sat before her and wagged his tail, whining imploringly.

"You want to go with her?" asked Miss Thorne bitterly. The little dog leaped up against her again and again. "Well, she doesn't care what you want, you may be sure. You can come out in the kitchen with me, if you want to, but you'll be very unlike your mistress if you do;" and she went back to her work, Bijou following closely.

When he discovered that Polly had no intention of taking him to search for Susan, he lay down in a strip of sunshine, his nose between his paws, and cried softly under his breath, until he forgot his woes in slumber.

CHAPTER X.

"SO SHALL MY DARLING BE."

AS Susan tripped gaily down the path beside Layton, Irene thought she had never seen her look prettier, and she presented Leo to her with much satisfaction.

"It seems quite wonderful, Mr. Graham, to see you in the flesh," said Susan, as the carriage started. "I have never been able to think of you otherwise than as an infant prodigy in kilts. — Irene, it was lovely of you to remember me. It would have been positive cruelty to let me languish in my valley when you were all going on the lake. Mr. Layton has just been telling me the plan. You will let me row, won't you, Mr. Graham? At home we row a great deal, and I promise not to catch a single crab. Isn't it the strangest thing that Mr. Layton and I are old friends? Imagine my surprise when he dropped from the clouds there in the orchard!" and the viva-

cious Susan proceeded to describe her chance acquaintance with Layton in Venice.

"Ah, you remember it well enough, now," said Philip reproachfully; "but it would touch your hearts to hear how I had to stimulate her memory out there in the orchard."

"Heavens and earth! Bijou!" exclaimed Susan. "I've forgotten him."

"That black dog?" questioned Layton.

"Yes. My poor little Bijou; he will be heart-broken."

"Oh, he will get along," said Philip. "You see we are just a quartette without him."

"I do not believe you like dogs," said Susan suspiciously.

"Not those little midgets," admitted Layton.

"Well, I have a great mind to ask you to go back for him, Mr. Graham."

"No, indeed, Susan," said Irene decidedly. "See how high the sun is getting! We want to get out on the water before it grows too warm."

The breeze was so good that the little party decided to sail instead of to row, and for an hour and a half Graham's well-known little boat cruised about the lake, meeting many other craft, some of which contained acquaintances and friends.

Susan claimed perfectly to understand sailing, and volunteered to change places with Leo; but the latter politely declined to be relieved.

"This boat goes better right-side up, Miss Farley," he said. He had not paid much attention to Susan, and the fact astonished her exceedingly. Layton's devoted glances were all very well. It was the sort of thing she was accustomed to; but Leo's indifference piqued her.

"It is plain to see that you have always had your own way, Mr. Graham."

"And one *might* infer that it surprises you when you do not get yours," returned Leo, laughing.

"Let me show you how well I know how to manage the sails, Mr. Graham, please," persisted Susan, adopting a coaxing tone.

"I am sorry to refuse," returned Leo; "but I am the cautious sort of fellow who knows when it is best to be afraid."

Irene deeply enjoyed the swift, bounding motion, but was the quietest person in the boat. She was silently, and Susan volubly, reluctant to land when lunch time arrived.

"Has your morning pleased you, Irene?" asked Leo, when they two were ascending the path behind

the boat-house. She looked at him with dark eloquent eyes.

"I shall never forget my first sail," she said. Life seemed rich and full to her as she spoke. The perfect weather, the hospitable home, these kind friends, and the fact that she had been instrumental in enlarging Susan's horizon so pleasantly, filled her with gratitude and appreciation. "It is not every day you will see a perfectly happy woman," she added, with a brilliant smile, "so I advise you to look at me."

"What a blessing to have met you at this early stage of your existence!" returned Leo. "Your happiness is infectious. I wish, Irene, I could defend you from the loss of it," he added heartily.

"I shall not lose this," returned the girl quickly. "I shall always have these days to remember — afterward."

"What is coming afterward?" asked her companion curiously.

"My father, — and boarding, — and some loneliness," returned Irene slowly, a withdrawing from her face of the luminous expression of inward joy. "But how much better I can bear it now!" she added cheerfully. "You see, when I left school I did not think things were going to be as they proved to be, and I suppose I wore away my strength in resenting

it. Now I shall go back with my mind made up for what is coming, and there are two months nearly before I must go. Think how rich I shall be in memories, and in a general strength that will make me take up some useful work and accomplish something at it, instead of living in my shell, as I have done before."

Leo was still somewhat mystified concerning Irene's past life; but it stirred all that was chivalrous in his nature to hear her talk, and his determination grew to prevent her loss of the summer's pleasure, so sweet to her uncloyed palate.

"How Susan has enjoyed the morning!" she continued, casting a glance over her shoulder at her friend, who was dawdling slowly along beside Layton. "Is she not very pretty?"

"Very," returned Graham quietly; "but, as you correctly observed, not quite so young as yourself."

"Oh, she is a year younger," said Irene quickly.

Leo smiled, but did not reply. "I wonder how Aunt Emma is," he said, looking up at the windows as they approached the house.

"I will go immediately and find out," returned Irene.

"Ask her, please, if she feels able to see me."

Irene took Susan to her room and left her there,

while she hurried to Miss Trowbridge's apartment. This time the maid admitted her.

Susan gave a touch to her hair, wandered about the room a few minutes, and then, as her friend did not return, went down stairs to the cool shade of Miss Trowbridge's sitting-room, where Graham and Layton were looking at the papers. Very soon after Susan's entrance Irene came in. Leo looked up and saw that she was pale and troubled. She colored as she caught his eye.

"Miss Trowbridge is coming down to lunch," she said. "Her head is — somewhat better." She passed out upon the piazza. Leo followed her, and she turned to him with her usual directness.

"It seems I have done something very wrong," she said anxiously. "Miss Trowbridge says I ought not to have invited Susan while she was ill; that it will not do at all for us four to lunch without her, and that it is necessary that she, suffering though she is, should come down stairs. I did not know it was any harm." Irene's eyes were moist. "I asked you, you know. Why did you let me do it? I am so ignorant of etiquette."

"It was right and kind to do it," said Leo hotly. "What does Aunt Emma mean? We are not going

to ape conventionality up here by ourselves. I hope she did not say anything unkind to you."

"Oh, no, no," replied the girl quickly, frightened by his tone. "She was very patient with me, considering how evidently she felt reproachful. I am so very sorry; but it isn't poor Susan's fault, and I do hope she need not know that there is any trouble."

"She shall not;" and Leo hurried back into the room in order to meet his aunt as soon as she should appear. He was surprised to find it a keen personal disappointment that Irene's beatific mood should have been rudely changed. He had never felt so impatient with his aunt as when, a few moments later, she came slowly into the room, her head held stiffly, and her face haggard from suffering. She shook hands with Susan, Irene watching the greeting with anxious eyes, then her nephew passed his arm about her.

"Are you really so much better, Aunt Emma?"

"Very little better, I thank you," was the solemn reply.

"Then why do you come down?" asked Leo boldly.

Miss Trowbridge deprecated his question with raised eyebrows. "My dear, we have a guest," she replied.

"And surely I am host here," said the young man. "I promise not to disgrace you by the way I do the

honors. Let me lead you up stairs again. Let me carry you."

Miss Trowbridge put out a warning hand. "I will stay down, I thank you."

Irene looked ready to cry. She cast a glance at Susan, and was surprised to see that young woman demurely and mischievously repressing her laughter. Irene need not have hoped to conceal anything from the astute Susan. The latter had grasped the situation instantly. She knew Irene was in disgrace, and she pitied her; but for Miss Trowbridge's annoyance she felt only ridicule, and her sole regret was that it was vain to hope that Leo would show any admiration of her own charms calculated to tease the guardian of his heart and hand.

"Well, Aunt Emma," said Leo resignedly, "you make me feel very uncomfortable, firstly, to think that I have made you forego your usual early dinner, and secondly, inasmuch as you insist on regarding us formally; but we must do the best we can under the circumstances;" and with this introduction Leo turned the conversation into impersonal channels, finding vigorous aid from the unabashed Susan, while Irene made conscientious attempts not to appear silent or distrait.

The subject of tennis came up at last, and Susan

expressed delight that now she should have a companion in her favorite game, and she audaciously challenged Leo to a contest at the first opportunity.

"That need not be far off," said Leo cordially. "We will have a game this afternoon, if you agree, — two or three hours from now, when it is cool. Aunt Emma, we must keep Miss Farley to dinner, and not let her go home until evening."

Miss Trowbridge bowed with dignity. "Unless you think Miss Thorne would be anxious," she said to Susan.

The latter opened her blue eyes with child-like frankness. "I think she would be pleased," she said. "It is long since she had a *tête-à-tête* tea with her brother. Oh my!" Susan colored with sudden remembrance, and leaned back in her chair. "Mr. Thorne said he would take me to drive this afternoon, and I forgot it," she said blankly.

"I will have Moses drive you right down," said Miss Trowbridge with polite alacrity.

"No, thank you," replied Susan cheerfully, "it is too late. We were to have gone at half-past twelve."

After lunch the quartette naturally drifted to the piazza. Irene placed pillows in a reclining-chair for Miss Trowbridge, and after the latter was seated the

girl remained close by her side for a long time. Irene's quiet, loving little ways were soothing, and Miss Trowbridge was not insensible to the sincere regret at having transgressed her wishes, which appeared in the girl's every look and act.

Susan and Philip walked back and forth under the shade of a spreading oak. Leo lay in a hammock and watched his aunt and her *protégée*. "Do you like to read aloud, Irene?" he asked, at length.

"I — don't know," she answered.

"Another thing you have not tried," he said, smiling. She colored faintly. "That is true. Father never had time for it."

"I wish you would read something now to Aunt Emma and me."

"I will, with pleasure."

Graham went into the house and brought out a novel, the authorship of which had better not be stated, for ere Irene had finished two chapters Miss Trowbridge's even breathing evinced the fact that the remnant of her headache had been exorcised by the reader's soothing tones.

"That is enough, Irene," said Graham gently. "You see Aunt Emma's infesting cares have folded their tents like the Arabs and silently stolen away." He stepped out of the hammock. "Let me bring

your chair a little nearer me, — or will you take the hammock?" Irene shook her head. "Then sit here and tell me all you will about yourself."

Susan glanced over toward the piazza and saw the movements there. "How odd, *odd*," she reflected, "that he should admire Irene more than he does me! He probably does not like small women nor light hair;" and having partially disposed of a very knotty problem she returned to her flirtation with Layton.

The latter had observed her glance and thoughtful brow. "How do you fancy Miss Trowbridge would like that?" he asked, with a motion of his hand toward the house.

"Oh, but she is asleep," replied Susan quickly; "and mice will play just as friskily when the cat is asleep as when she is away."

"Yes, but I fancy when she is awake she does not like it."

"Any more than she did my coming here to-day," added Susan scornfully.

"Why should she not like that?"

Miss Farley gave him an ironical smile. "Why, Mr. Graham might — it was barely possible that he might — have admired your Venetian acquaintance, and Miss Trowbridge has not kept her idol under a

glass case all his life to expose him now to the possibility of admiring the wrong woman."

"Who is the right woman? I have not heard of any one."

"Oh, the usual not impossible *she*," returned Susan, lightly; "some creature who has family, good breeding, beauty, youth, wealth, and all the accomplishments. I understand Miss Trowbridge. I have picked up considerable information concerning her since I have been in Proctor."

"You place Graham in a very absurd position, Miss Farley."

"His aunt placed him there first," retorted Susan. "Fancy a man being willing to be pointed at as a particularly desirable bit of fruit supposedly coveted by all the girls of his acquaintance, and preserved from them only by the greatest precautions until she who is destined to appropriate him appears, when, the girl having been carefully examined through Miss Trowbridge's eye-glasses, he is permitted to drop from his lofty height into her eager arms!" and Susan's small nose was lifted more than ever contemptuously by her curling lip.

Layton laughed. "In common fairness to Graham," he returned, "you should be made to under-

stand that he has no suspicion of his rôle as Forbidden Fruit."

"Then he must be very dull."

"Not at all. He is a first-rate fellow, always doing something pleasant for some other fellow, and while his bringing up has made him careless in manner and certain of pleasing, I have always thought that an added charm to his personality. It is fortunate for me, though, if you do not think so;" and Layton caught his companion's eye with an ardent expression that sent a glow of gratified vanity through her veins.

Susan's only reply was a shrug of her shoulders.

"I should think Graham too young," continued Layton, "to find much charm in your friend's lack of sophistication. She is beautiful, but"—

"Oh, you, too, think Miss Flanders beautiful," interrupted Susan, looking across meditatively at Irene. "Is she not an odd combination of dignity and innocence? She is the best girl in the world," she finished, without enthusiasm, but with conviction.

"Then why may she not be the possible '*she*' that Miss Trowbridge has been waiting for?" asked Layton with a smile.

"In the first place, her father jilted Miss Trowbridge in the days of their youth," replied Susan.

"Irene does not suppose that I know it, but my landlady told me in a burst of confidence. In fact, all the town knows it."

"Then why does Miss Trowbridge entertain her?"

"Simply out of curiosity, and loneliness in Mr. Graham's absence." Susan burst into a merry laugh. "It was a rich joke, his coming back. I shall watch events now. I will wager anything that Miss Trowbridge brought on that headache cudgelling her brains for a decent way to rid herself of her guest; and poor Irene, great, stately baby that she is, will suspect nothing until very transparent measures are taken."

"What rôle do you intend to play in our little drama?" asked her companion.

"Oh, I shall keep my ears and eyes open and my mouth closed. I can assure you *I* do not want Irene to go away."

"Nor I," said Layton tenderly, "for then I fear The Eyrie would see you no more."

Miss Trowbridge wakened during the movements that preceded the game of tennis, and graciously admitting that her head was comfortable, accompanied the four young people to the tennis ground, which lay half-way down the hill at the rear of the house, the land there having been filled in for the purpose.

Irene did not know the game, and Layton was not yet sufficiently strong to take violent exercise; so Susan and Leo played and the others looked on.

Miss Farley had at last the satisfaction of seeing pleased admiration of herself show in her opponent's face. She was an extremely good player, had won several badges and medals, and appeared at her best this afternoon. Her audience was enthusiastic, and Graham, at the close of a hard-won game, shook hands with her heartily.

"Miss Farley, if you can sail as well as you play tennis, I am almost sorry I did not give you the tiller this morning."

Susan fanned herself with her hat. "Hereafter I hope you will believe a lady when she makes a modest assertion about her own abilities," she said.

That evening Layton insisted on being her escort home, and he drove through such devious ways as to lengthen the drive to twice the necessary distance. When they reached the Thornes' gate and he helped her from the buggy, he held her hand a moment.

"When you want utterly to subjugate a man," he said, "let him see you play tennis. The lines of the little song sang themselves through my brain as I watched you.

"'Graceful and slender, light as a fawn,
Loving and tender, bright as the dawn,
Dearer than all to me,
So shall my darling be.'"

"It is a song I do not know," said Susan demurely, "and you are holding my hand, Mr. Layton." So saying, she withdrew it, said "Good-night," and walked up the path toward the house, where a light burned in the window.

"Good-by till day after to-morrow," said Layton. He saw her disappear within the house, and then drove away.

When Susan entered the parlor to put out the light she was surprised to see Phineas sitting by a table reading. The pleasant little feeling of elation with which she had entered the house oozed away. She realized the lateness of the hour. She realized the rude indifference with which she had neglected her engagement with him.

"You up still, Mr. Thorne?" she said.

"Why, certainly," he replied. "Did you think Polly and I would go to sleep without knowing you were safely at home? Have you had a pleasant day?"

Susan felt grateful for the absence of reproach in his tone and manner.

"Very pleasant," she replied; "but it was marred

by the fact that I had neglected to leave word for you that I — that I — "

"That you had received a pleasanter invitation. I understand."

"Why, that was not it," said Susan, reddening uncomfortably.

"Be honest, Susan; you are usually honest. Of course it was pleasanter, else you would not have accepted it. That is all right."

Phineas, as the two last slow hours had crept by, had been wondering within himself who would escort Susan home, and whether it was not his duty to remonstrate if it should prove that she was driving so late with one of the young men from The Eyrie. He felt that Susan's mother would not be pleased, and that he and Polly were scarcely exercising the guardianship over her daughter which the mother had expected.

For one moment he considered asking the girl how and with whom she had come home, but he decided that surely he ought to trust Miss Trowbridge's judgment. She had, of course, invited Susan to her house, and would see that she reached home in a safe and proper manner. So he only said, quietly, "I am glad you have had one happy day in Proctor.

Go up stairs and I will put out the lights. Good-night."

But Susan lingered. She could not tell why she desired this man's good opinion. It must be owing to some higher cause than her customary vanity, for he was not sufficiently young or dashing to inspire her with a wish to fascinate him.

"I should feel better," she said, "if you would say you forgive me. I do feel ashamed. I think I see myself with your eyes when I am with you." She looked very charming in her meekness, and Phineas was conscious of feeling flattered by her manner. He blew out a lamp on a tiny stand before he answered. Then he turned toward her.

"I forgive you heartily," he said.

Susan hesitated a moment as though expecting something more. Then she said the good-night for which he seemed waiting, and went up to her room.

Bijou, hearing her step, scratched frantically at the door, and when Susan entered he leaped upon her in wild delight. She caught him up and held him off at arms' length between her two hands, while he grinned at her in panting fatigue.

"Bijou, you have no business to like me," she said. "I am a selfish, vain, foolish girl. I even forgot you to-day, but *you*," with a sudden change

of tone, drawing him to her and kissing the top of his sleek head, "you like me just the same. You are more forgiving than people who would think themselves your superiors."

CHAPTER XI.

AN AWAKENING.

SUSAN had the grace to dread a little coming down to breakfast the next morning. She was prepared for Polly's ostentatious indifference, and she was sufficiently ashamed of herself to accept it with a sweet humility that roused Phineas' partisanship.

Indeed, it was from this morning that the latter ever afterward dated a new conception of his guest which it pleased him to entertain. Before to-day she had seemed to him a child playing at womanhood. Henceforward he realized that she was a woman, and her childishness a manner indulged in because it suited her *petite* prettiness and amused her admirers.

She was not consciously affected, but as time went on Phineas noted the flashes of good sense that occasionally illuminated her talk when she was interested and self-forgetful, and noticed also how instinctively,

upon finding herself observed, she reverted to the flippancy she had always found successful, both as a means of entertaining and as an excuse for not burdening herself with serious thought.

She was a petted creature, with a character at present by no means admirable to analyze, and up to to-day the little notice Phineas had taken of her had been perfunctory, and his desire to help her purely unselfish.

From this morning, however, some hitherto unsuspected charm in the girl began to make itself felt. Phineas did not realize it at first. He only knew that he thought Polly unnecessarily cold to Susan, and that made him show the latter a cordiality for which she repaid him with grateful and confiding glances.

She accompanied him to the door when he started for business that morning. "Miss Polly is so cross, and I deserve it," she said naïvely; "but," she breathed a sigh, "I wish you did not have to go to the office to-day." Again Phineas felt flattered, and the amusement the sensation caused him did not efface it.

"You will find Polly a very easy person to mollify," he returned. "However, I have another errand out of the village to-day, and if you wish it

I will take you with me for the drive, — that postponed drive."

She colored and looked at him with a momentary shyness which was very pretty. "I do not deserve that you should," she said.

Phineas drove away with a pleasant, novel sensation of interest. He was aware that should he come home at noon and find the bird flown, it would not be such a matter of indifference to him as it had been on the day before.

The bird had not flown when he returned. Susan had succeeded in winning Polly out of her displeasure, and now started in the best of spirits for her drive with Phineas. She took pains to be entertaining, and made herself such a pleased and pleasing companion, that Thorne promised himself to take no more solitary drives while she remained in Proctor.

It soon came to pass, however, that he found it not always easy to secure a leisure morning or afternoon with Susan. Philip Layton pursued his acquaintance with her with unremitting energy. Scarce a day passed during which he did not appear at the cottage on some pretext, and Susan welcomed him gladly. Proctor began to brighten for her. Layton was a good talker, and often he brought her an interesting book from which she read aloud to

him, when in their walks they had found some picturesque spot where Philip gained a suggestion for his sketch-book.

Phineas shook his head over all this, and questioned Polly uneasily; but the latter saw no objection to the intimacy. She was glad to have Susan entertained, and she admired Mr. Layton. Her leniency prevented Thorne from expressing his disapproval, because the uneasiness he felt had led to his waking with a shock to the realization that, struggle as he might, there was no escape for him from the bonds that morning, noon, and night had been swiftly, surely, if innocently, woven about himself; and this fact made him distrust his own judgment.

Susan seemed to grow more gentle and lovable as time went on. Her pertness disappeared, though her vivacity remained. She saw Irene occasionally, and after a day with this friend, Phineas always thought he observed a serious thoughtfulness about Susan which was ten times more charming than her piquancy. Her manner to Polly changed noticeably for the better, and the latter grew to accept the girl's assistance, offered though it was at first as if it were an absurdity that she should really perform any of the necessary work about a house.

Association with Irene had started in Susan the

germs of new and wholesome desires. The latter realized that little by little her self-satisfaction was being undermined, and that her standards were changing. Many things in which she had always taken pride grew unworthy in her eyes. She made no confessions to Irene, nor did she express regrets or resolutions; but she drew her friend out on this and that subject, and pondered afterward over the simple, clear fashion in which right was separated from wrong in Irene's mind, and she realized that it would be a good and safe thing for her to let herself be guided by the latter's opinions.

The girls could not often be together, for Irene was being more and more monopolized at The Eyrie.

As Leo had been his aunt's sovereign from babyhood, it was not likely that when the moment came for one to yield to the other in an important matter, it would be she who would remain firm.

She knew that she had displeased him on the day which Susan spent at The Eyrie, and she was glad to win back his favor by a gracious acceptance of all the amends Irene had to offer for her blunder.

There was a constant undercurrent of anxiety and dissatisfaction in her mind, nevertheless. With all her heart she wished Irene away, and it was superlative testimony to the girl's sweetness of character

that in the days that followed Miss Trowbridge did not learn to hate her. She told herself at times that her fears might be absurd. Although it was inconceivable to her that any girl could live in the house with her handsome, wholesome, sunny-tempered nephew and not see in him the fulfilment of her brightest day-dreams, she could understand it to be possible that he might be thrown daily with an attractive young woman, and yet, with his social experience, not be led into more than friendly relations with her.

Since admitting her fears to him on the evening of his arrival, she had not again touched upon the subject. She had sufficient knowledge of human nature to realize that if Irene were to stay it would be a mistaken course to hold before Leo's eyes the possible danger of the result. Often she wished her emotion had not betrayed her into speaking to him even that once. At times she fancied he had never since treated her with quite spontaneous affection, and the thought was misery to her.

Why, after all, she queried, should she distress herself? Leo must marry some time. Why not Irene? But the answer came with unhesitating promptness. Irene had Richard Flanders' blood in her veins, and then she was nobody. A pleasant, even-tempered, unselfish sort of girl, doubtless, but

rather phlegmatic and commonplace; and then,—nobody. Leo ought to marry a brilliant, accomplished woman. Wherever he and his wife went the world should hear of them. All the vague ambitions for her darling that Miss Trowbridge had ever entertained began to formulate themselves as they never before had done; and when she had painted her picture, she found no place in it for Irene Flanders.

Meanwhile, Irene went on leading her happy, blameless life, neither more nor less attentive to her hostess than she had been before the arrival of the young men. She still exercised her pretty faculty of being always in the right place at the right time. She was equally ready to put graceful touches to the living-rooms, or to accompany Leo when he wished to play on his violin; to pose patiently for Layton when he needed a figure to complete a sketch, or to pick out a pattern in crochet for Miss Trowbridge.

Even when they all had learned to turn to her for sympathy or assistance, as naturally as the flower seeks the sun, only one in the house even dimly appreciated what she was to them, and what the home would be like when they should come into it and seek in vain for the gracious form, listen in vain

for the gentle voice. Alas for Miss Trowbridge! That one was her nephew.

His had been always a wonderfully harmonious life. His aunt had held good theories concerning the sphere to be kept about little children. His babyhood had never been poisoned by harshness or anger. When he grew to be a school-boy his physical strength, kind heart, and generous pocket had made him a favorite among his mates, and this popularity continued throughout his college days. He had always been, as Layton said, "doing something pleasant for some other fellow," and he builded better than he knew in thus keeping himself surrounded by kind and cordial sentiments. His tastes were healthy and therefore pure, and it goes without saying that Leo Graham was nearly as great a favorite with the opposite sex as his aunt imagined.

Of course he had met many young women, all in the world of society, and he always discriminated among them, unconsciously, with the intuition which belonged to his uncontaminated nature. He talked and rode and danced and sailed with these young girls in the round of fashionable occupation, and was always an alert, interesting cavalier, fully sensible to the charms of his companions; but as soon as

he met Irene his soul knew her. There was nothing false, or low, or artificial about either of them. Each quality of hers, as it appeared, answered some need in himself; but as yet he only knew that he was ever eager, yet always satisfied in her presence. He had never analyzed his feelings on any subject, and as yet had not come to do so in this case. All his life, cause and effect had been to him wish and have. Well, whenever he wished now for Irene she came. He was content.

One discomfort still clung vaguely by him. It was that talk which his aunt had had with him on the evening of his return. It roughly opened up possible lines of thought from which he intuitively turned away. It had left a disagreeable impression, as of unfit disturbance in a sacred place. Each time it came back to him he thrust it out of his mind; but it had had the effect of setting him firmly against the injustice of banishing Irene, and this effect remained.

He kept his aunt under constant surveillance, and of this she was conscious. She tried to enlist Layton on her side by endeavoring to lead him into an admission that he would like to try the salt air. She enlarged to him upon the invigoration he would receive, and declared her perfect willingness to pack

up at a moment's notice and remove to the sea; but Layton was firm in his preference for Proctor. The acquaintance which had begun at *table d'hôte* in Venice had ripened for him into an ardent love affair, and no persuasion was strong enough to tempt him away from his present surroundings. Also he said he could plead invalidism no longer. Although he might still look a little pale, he had never felt better; so Miss Trowbridge sighed and resigned one more hope.

She thought it might be a comfort to her to have a little consultation with Miss Thorne, yet leaving home in these days was a dangerous luxury in which she seldom indulged. She determined to ask Leo to be her escort one morning. In that way she could venture peacefully. She accordingly broached the subject at the breakfast table, saying to her nephew that she would like him to drive her to the Thornes' before lunch.

He looked at her smilingly. "My dear aunt, you know you do not want me about while you and Miss Polly are discussing recipes, and surely you would not doom me to walk the horse up and down the street for an interminable hour, waiting for you, especially when Irene has promised to take a rowing lesson this morning."

"Do not speak of that, Mr. Graham," said Irene. "It is of no consequence at all if Miss Trowbridge wants you."

"Pray, could you not visit Miss Farley instead of walking the horse up and down the street?" asked Miss Trowbridge. She felt almost affection for Susan since discovering Leo's indifference to her, an indifference which succeeding days had made more and more evident.

"I could, but —"

"I was intending in any case to go to Miss Thorne's this morning," interrupted Layton. "Miss Farley was so kind as to promise to let me sketch her orchard retreat this morning, with herself as the central figure. I was intending to walk, but if I can be of any service —"

"The very thing," assented Leo. "That settles it, of course. I cannot visit Miss Farley while she is posing."

Miss Trowbridge turned upon Layton with a fierce air. "Thank you very much, Mr. Layton," she said curtly. After a pause she added, "I do not think you had better stay long on the water, Irene, the sun will be too hot. I should be much obliged, too, if you could find time to rip up that skirt we were

speaking of, and please keep it in my room on a sheet, for there will be some dust about it."

"Work for your maid, I should suppose," suggested Leo, looking, his aunt felt, into her most secret motive with his steady gaze.

"It is something I asked to do. What do you know about it?" exclaimed Irene, with such unusual asperity that Leo smiled.

"I stand corrected," he said, looking back at his plate.

The buggy containing Miss Trowbridge and Layton had just driven away, and Irene and Leo were standing within the drapery of one of the great windows in the drawing-room, whither they had gone to ascertain the condition of the lake.

Irene looked very serious. "Why do you interfere when your aunt tells me her wishes?" she asked. "It is not right. She does me a favor when she lets me serve her in any way. Can't you understand?"

"I told you I stood corrected," pleaded Leo. "Why trample upon a fellow when he is down?"

"Because I begin to notice that you frequently imply some contradiction of her wishes when the subject of conversation concerns me. Now, let me tell you, that it is very officious. You ought to have

gone with her to the Thornes' too, since she requested it."

"I disagree with you there, and you know I seldom do that," he returned, admiring her kindling eyes. "I should have gone if she had pressed the matter, but it would have been unreasonable for her to do so under the circumstances, and I am glad she did not, but instead accepted Layton's offer with such feeling gratitude."

Irene tried not to smile. "I am sure," she said, "you do not often enough stop to think of all you owe her. Think of her years of patient care of you. In a mother it is always touching enough, but who would expect so much from an aunt?"

Leo looked into her serious face with mirthful eyes.

> "Who ran to catch me when I fell,
> And kissed the place to make it well?
> Aunt Emma!"

"I am sure she did many a time," returned Irene warmly. "It is not at all nice to be flippant about this. You have been her one thought all your life; your health, your morals, your clothes, your pains, your joys. Instead of having husband and children of her own, she has concentrated her strength upon efforts for you."

"Irene," said Graham, pulling his mustache, "you

are slowly but surely making me feel bad. If you say much more I shall run after the buggy, and I warn you that I am out of training and it might lay me up, and you would have to take care of me."

"And Mr. Layton tells me," continued the girl, her serious gaze meeting his, "that your aunt is very rich and will leave every penny of her fortune to you."

"Well," returned Graham shortly, "Layton might have left that."

"He did not tell me I must not speak of it. He said Miss Trowbridge did not hesitate to declare it, and that it is generally known. How that must make you feel!" and Irene shook her head slowly.

A curious expression came into Graham's eyes, a look half fearful, half expectant. It would trouble him to find his whimsical fancies concerning Irene shattered by the discovery that she had learned the first lesson which contact with the world teaches. "You think that transcends all the other things — the care and affection, and all the rest?" he asked.

"No, the leaving of her fortune is a thing apart. It is the work of a moment and costs little. I mean how you must feel the responsibility of your future in having that money to spend."

Leo looked rather blank. "I don't," he said

bluntly. "She may lose it all yet; or," he smiled again, "I may marry to displease her."

Irene made a scornful gesture. "You would not imply that dear Miss Trowbridge would be like the stupid, selfish people in books, and deprive the one she loved best because he chose to marry some one whom she did not select?"

"People in real life outdo all the vagaries of people in books, Irene."

The latter kept silent, and looked into space with the expression of a child who is adjusting her mind to a novel proposition.

"What are you?" she asked presently.

"Male biped, genus man."

"Don't be silly. What is your business?"

"I could practise law if any one was suffering to retain me."

"Then you had better keep up your reading."

"Why?"

"Because you *might*, you know, — you might love some one Miss Trowbridge did not select."

Leo's eyes alone smiled. "Yet from mercenary motives I might not marry her."

Irene surveyed him with her clear, direct glance, and shook her head. "You are not that sort," she said briefly.

"Well, if you think it is not necessary for me to begin reading before afternoon, supposing we go out on the lake," suggested Leo, after a pause.

Irene smiled and turned away from the window.

"But let us have one piece first," continued her companion, moving to the piano and taking up his violin.

Irene seated herself and opened the leaves of a short cradle song. "It is nice of you to play simple things, so that I can accompany you," she said, "and you play so perfectly in tune."

"Yes, at last. You should have heard me at first. I think from the very beginning Aunt Emma was convinced that I was a second Paganini, but I fortunately knew one tune from another, so I began by practising in the barn, after a time was promoted to the cellar, and now, as you see, I am a drawing-room favorite."

They played the tender little song, and Leo suggested another.

"Then it will be instead of the lake. I shall like it quite as well, but I must go to ripping that dress pretty soon."

"You really mean to rip that dress this morning, when we have things all to ourselves, not even Layton here to entertain?"

"Certainly I do, — a great deal more than I intend to go on the lake. I anticipate it more highly."

"Irene, Irene! A maiden, too, who sprang from the emblem of truth!"

"Do you know, Mr. Graham," she said, not heeding him, "I fancy you and Mr. Layton have very little in common?"

"You insist upon calling me 'Mister.'"

"Yes, indeed. Do not talk about that," said Irene quickly.

"Well, of course I am but a poor, earth-born mortal, and deserve nothing better. Yes, Philip and I have the love of art in common, the difference being that he can handle a brush and I cannot. Perhaps there is not much else. I expected to enjoy my trip with him very much. He would have taught me to look at things appreciatively."

Irene shook her head. "You two are not congenial," she said, "and I think you are very kind to him, and — unselfish."

Leo laughed quietly and shook his head. "Tardy justice, Irene; tardy justice. You think to console me for the obloquy heaped upon me a little while ago, but it is rather late."

Irene rose. "In that case, I will go and get ready for the lake," she said. "You know you deserved the obloquy."

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE ORCHARD.

PHILIP Layton had been too much absorbed in his own interests to realize that he was opposing his hostess' plans in offering to escort her to make her morning call, and he felt the weight of her silent displeasure as they started from home.

"Had I paid more attention, Miss Trowbridge," he said apologetically, "I should have seen that it would be better to pursue my own course this morning rather than to force you into accepting me as your companion. You had some special reason for desiring Leo —"

"Young people are always selfish," interrupted Miss Trowbridge shortly.

Layton could not help smiling. "Well, I am old enough to know better," he admitted. "I acknowledge my stupidity in this instance, and in future will remember to efface myself at the proper moment."

His companion gave him a half-suspicious side-

glance. "I see none too much of my nephew, now that he has grown to be a man," she said more mildly. "I am naturally anxious to make occasional opportunities to have a quiet talk with him."

"Precisely; I understand," replied the other with an air of sympathetic comprehension which had the effect of making his companion incline to be confidential with him.

"Young men are careless," she sighed. "I dare say Leo wonders why seeing him at table and on the piazzas does not suffice me. He is very bright in these days," she added interrogatively. "Don't you think so?"

"Graham is always bright," returned Layton, suspecting that the other was about to introduce a delicate subject, and wondering whether his better course would be to invite her confidence or to sham ignorance. "He is the most even-tempered, sunny person I ever knew," he continued. "But what wonder? Was he not born with a silver spoon in his mouth? Has he ever been thwarted or worried like the rest of mankind? Does not every one know that you have spent your life building defences about him? He is like a young tree planted in the most congenial soil, shielded from tempests, and fed with precisely the right proportions of rain and sunshine. Such a

lot as his is only occasional; therefore he is properly a remarkable fellow."

Miss Trowbridge softened under this flattery. "Ah, Mr. Layton," she returned in a voice that trembled with feeling, "if I could only be permitted still to direct his destiny! Why will he not trust one who has so far made him happy? Already he begins quietly to defy me. He, my little child, is now a man. In a few days he will be twenty-five years old. He must think for himself, use his own immature judgment, and perhaps be drawn into serious trouble only for lack of taking the advice of one who never yet deceived him." Miss Trowbridge turned her face away and Layton murmured some indistinct words of sympathy.

"Has he ever talked to you about Irene?" continued the other, looking back at him suddenly.

"About Miss Flanders?"

"Yes. I do not think he would say anything to you that he has not said to me, and I have no wish to spy upon him. I only wish you to tell me if you think he is interested in her."

"Oh, yes. I think they are congenial companions. Do you not?"

"And you think that is all?"

"I do. Do you fear more than that?"

"I always fear," returned Miss Trowbridge with curt severity, "when a young man and a young woman are shut up together in a country house."

"Then why not separate them?" asked Layton.

"How, pray," asked Miss Trowbridge sharply, "when Irene so often states her enjoyment here, and Leo is determined she shall stay as long as she is happy?"

"Do you suspect that Miss Flanders is less free from design than she appears?"

"No," replied Miss Trowbridge reluctantly. "I believe she is transparently honest."

They were both silent for a time; then Layton spoke.

"I wish I could give you a helpful suggestion, Miss Trowbridge."

"I did not expect that; but you can do me a favor, if you will, by telling me if at any time you observe signs which warn me to act promptly; for I will take you into my confidence and tell you that, lovely as Miss Flanders is, I have good reasons for objecting to a match between her and my nephew. You are in a position to oblige me greatly, if you will, by being present with them as often as possible. If you have any reason to suppose that you would be unwelcome,

then the time has already come when I should be warned, and I beg you to say so honestly."

"I have no reason to think so," said Layton earnestly. He was beginning to fear lest his own summer idyl should be disturbed by an upheaval at The Eyrie, and he promised Miss Trowbridge to attend to her wishes and to respect her confidence, at the same time soothing her fears by pointing out the utter absence of sentiment which characterized the daily intercourse of Irene and Leo.

"And in a month from now," he added, "when they part, and Miss Flanders retires into obscurity and Graham is swept into the social vortex, can you doubt that he will shortly forget this quiet little episode in his life?"

Miss Trowbridge was not sorry to listen to this comforting view of the subject, upon which Layton enlarged in a soothing strain until they turned in at the Thornes' driveway.

Miss Trowbridge went into the house, and Layton, leaving the horse with a boy who would take it to the barn, hurried with eager steps to the orchard. He sought Susan's tree, but she was not visible, and his heart sank with disappointment. He had assured himself that she would be waiting for him there, her

pale-blue dress and curling hair making a delicate effect of color among the foliage.

As he turned irresolutely, he saw her coming slowly toward him over the grass, taking off a long white apron as she came.

"It is too early," she said, smiling. "I did not expect you yet."

"Too early," he repeated rapturously, coming forward and clasping her offered hand. "I began at sunrise to think of it."

"That was very foolish. Miss Thorne sent me out, but really I was not through with my work."

"What work?"

"Washing the dishes," replied Susan, enjoying the effect of her words.

"What sacrilege!" burst forth her admirer. "'O Curly-locks, Curly-locks, wilt thou be mine? Thou shalt not wash dishes, nor yet —'"

He paused, and Susan laughed. "You would spoil all your chances if you finished it," she said, "for it is great fun to feed the swine. I give them green apples. Do you want to come and let me show you?"

Layton shook his head. "Many thanks, no. I think you must be learning to love the country, after all. Why this sudden thirst for labor? I cannot associate you and dish-washing."

Susan colored. "It is right for me to help Miss Thorne, and I do; — but I am all ready now." She moved toward her tree and jumped lightly into the accustomed low bough. There was a slight constraint in her face and manner which struck Layton not unpleasantly. In his present frame of mind he gave each new sign a meaning favorable to his hopes. "I thought Miss Trowbridge looked depressed this morning," continued the girl. "Has anything occurred to annoy her?"

Layton seated himself on a flat rock and began arranging his sketching materials. "Why, I made one of my numerous mistakes this morning, and frustrated her efforts to bring Leo away from danger by offering myself as his substitute to escort her down here."

"Was that dulness or friendship on your part?"

"Dulness; because I was thinking so constantly about you that I took little note of what the others were saying."

Layton's gentle flattery had of late been her daily food; but this time Susan received it without comment, and with unusual gravity. "I wonder if Mr. Graham blessed you," she said.

"I cannot tell how much he cared."

"What a brilliant match that would be for Irene!

It looks hopeful that Miss Trowbridge has not found means to send her away."

"Or else it means that Miss Trowbridge thinks there is no danger," suggested Layton. "I would give you the latest bulletin if there were anything to tell, but upon my word I see no sign of any sentiment between them."

"And why should there be?" asked Susan, flashing into sudden ire. "As if they could not be good friends and nothing more! Why, pray, should they not be?"

"No earthly reason that I can see," responded Layton, looking up into her excited face with slow surprise.

"And you never could discover the least sentiment between Irene Flanders and *any* man, unless she were going to marry him," continued Susan, clasping and unclasping her hands nervously. "Do you suppose she would allow you to pay such outrageous compliments to her as you do to me?"

"I do not propose to test it," returned Layton, still studying his companion wonderingly.

"She knows nothing of such — such vain play as you and I are adepts in. She would scorn it."

Layton kept his eyes on her, but his face grew

serious. "Susan, I am not playing any longer," he said.

Susan forced an excited little laugh. "Oh, well, then, I suppose you must take your playthings and go home." The retort was in a tone that warned him that now was not the time to proceed. They were silent for a time; then—

"I should like to make that sketch now," he said quietly, "if you are in the mood."

"I have never been called a creature of moods," returned the girl, settling back against a friendly bough, while Layton began his work with ardor. "I said I would pose this morning, and I will. So you added to poor Miss Trowbridge's difficulty in her problem of disposing of the fox and the goose and the corn," she added. "Mr. Graham is the corn, Irene is the goose, and you are the sly fox that ran off with poor Miss Trowbridge; and if she finds the goose has made way with the corn when she gets back, it will be all your fault."

"How are your friends the robins?" asked Layton, making the diversion with the serious, quiet manner new to Susan.

"Gone, all gone. The nest is empty. I shall think of it next winter, full of soft, white snow.

How pure and clean it will be here in this still place, and how cold!"

"Shall you let me come to Chicago next winter?" he asked.

"How could I prevent it?"

"By saying you would not care to see me."

"Do you dance well?" asked Susan dispassionately.

"I believe so. Would that settle it?"

"It would go far toward it."

"Well, I think there will be an opportunity for you to test me. I hear rumors of a dancing party."

Susan's cheeks, which had not yet cooled from her agitation, flushed deeper, and her eyes lighted.

"Lean back, lean back," said the artist warningly.

"Well, tell me. I shall have to telegraph for a dress."

"I am not sure, remember, but I think Miss Trowbridge intends to give a party for Graham on his birthday, a couple of weeks hence."

"I hope so with all my heart," returned Susan.

Layton looked at her curiously for a moment, then continued his rapid work. "You should not marry a poor man, Miss Farley. Your love would be apt to 'fly out by the window when poverty came in at the door.'"

"That is true," she answered, "for I have not enough money for both."

"I am glad my profession is not all I have to look to," he continued, stopping a moment to send her a significant glance.

It cost her something to look back at him quietly.

"I am fortunate," he continued, "in having a rich grandfather and in being his only heir; but while the old gentleman lives I am not a penny the better off for him, save for an occasional present."

"Very good for you, no doubt," remarked Susan philosophically. "It makes you work."

Layton smiled. "Oh, I am willing to keep at my work. I love it. The chief difficulty is that not many other people are willing to put the price on it that I do. But when you see the picture I shall paint from this sketch, you will like it so much that you will want to be the purchaser yourself."

"What shall you ask for it?"

"A mere trifle; five hundred dollars, probably."

"Oh!" cried Susan, "I could not possibly afford it. You will have to be gallant enough to present it to me."

"So I will, for a consideration, that and all my art treasures beside." He stopped working again, and this time Susan could not return his ardent gaze.

"You are not like yourself to-day," she said impatiently.

"No, because I am in earnest," he answered in a low tone.

"Don't!" she exclaimed. "I do not believe you can be in earnest." The color streamed up over cheek and brow as she spoke; "and if I feel so, it is only because you have deserved it. Neither ought you to trust me. We have been flirting disgracefully. I know it. I have known it ever since day before yesterday when you — you — kissed my hands." She clasped them together again tightly. She had already left her seat, and now stood near him with her eyes fixed on the grass. "How many other men do you suppose have kissed those hands? Why should you not suppose that the way I have been walking, and talking, and flirting with you is my regular manner of walking, and talking, and flirting with men? But I tell you it is not so," looking at him with her eyes flashing, and speaking very low. "No man ever kissed my hands before, nor will again, unless they should belong to some one some time, and then not until I have told him all about it. I have suffered agonies of mortification in thinking things over, and putting Irene in my place. I couldn't put her in. She would not go in, and

that is what *kills* me. Think, when you are alone, — think of all the things you have said to me, things a man should only say to the woman who is going to stand by him all his life, through trouble or success alike. You have feigned the most sacred of feelings, and I have accepted the fraud, knowing it was pretence. Do you suppose I think myself any better than you? Not at all. But what I say now is that if we are to be friends at all henceforward we must begin at the beginning. If you thought — if you had in your mind the — the intention of saying anything important to me, do not persist in saying it unless you want simply to add to the farce which I shall always look back upon with shame." She paused. Layton was pale. He drew his brush twice across the unfinished, and now ruined, sketch.

"Miss Thorne is behind you," he said.

Susan bit her lip and closed her eyes for a second. Then Polly was beside her.

"How do you do, Mr. Layton?" said the newcomer cheerily. "Sorry to disturb you, but Miss Trowbridge is in a great taking to get home. She says she would be much obliged if you could make it convenient to come soon."

Layton rose. "At once," he responded, gathering up his materials. "Miss Farley and I had just fin-

ished." Here he turned to Susan. "I am exceedingly obliged for the pains you have taken to oblige me with a sitting. I trust you will not find yourself fatigued, or, if you do, that the consciousness of the success of the sketch will repay you for your trouble. Good-morning;" and he walked away by Miss Thorne's side, leaving Susan standing with a humiliating sense of shame upon her after all her valor and good resolutions. The realization that her thoughtlessness had ruined his morning's work overwhelmed her, and she felt weak from the effort she had made. So, being an undisciplined, wayward girl, she did what, under the reaction from her excitement, many a wiser sister would have done. She leaned her head against an apple bough there beneath the empty nest and sobbed her heart out.

She did not hear the step that approached, but she felt a gentle hand touching her shoulder. She started and turned her face sufficiently to see Phineas Thorne looking at her with infinite trouble and tenderness in his eyes.

"Susan, do tell me, my dear little girl," he said. Her first impulse was to dismiss him with anger at his intrusion; but she found suddenly that there was no one else whose presence could be so comforting to her.

"Stand — right — there," she sobbed, "and let me — cry."

"So I will," he answered.

There grew the old, old tumult within him as he stood, helpless, longing to do and to speak a thousand forbidden things. It was not the first victory over himself when, his hands clinched and his voice firm, he was able to address her again.

"Is there anything you would like to say to me when you feel better, Susan? Shall I wait?"

The graceful figure in its posture of abandon still heaved with sobs. "N-no," she said, and at the same time held out one of the little hands that were always distracting Phineas with longings which he as constantly suppressed. His face turned pale under its sunburn, and he hesitated before clasping the hand in his. His strong, firm touch relieved Susan's sense of desolation, and turned her weeping into a luxury.

"I want to take good care of you, Susan," said Thorne slowly. "Your mother expected it, and of course in receiving you here we tacitly promised it. You see — can't you see — that my position is a hard one?"

Susan nodded. "I was always a very hard girl to

take care of," she admitted, with considerable difficulty of speech.

"What am I to do if you will not confide in either Polly or me?" he pursued. "How far is it right to hamper you or to intrude upon you? Ah, Susan, I wish with all my heart that your mother would come home!"

"You have always wanted to be rid of me!" ejaculated the girl resentfully, drawing her hand away. "I am sure I do not blame you in the least."

"That is not so," returned the other hurriedly. "I dread the day that sees you leave us."

His tone was so strange that Susan lowered her handkerchief and looked at him, unmindful of her reddened eyes. "Do you, really?" she returned. "Well, I am going to take good care of myself in future. You may trust me. You are perfectly lovely if you like me," she added slowly and caressingly.

Phineas Thorne gave a short laugh. "Then there is no doubt about it; I am perfectly lovely!" and he turned quickly away and walked toward the house.

Susan stared for a moment in silent introspection; then she spoke aloud. "Susan Farley, you were doing it again!" she said, with amazed scorn. "Why don't you go and try to flirt with Bunker Hill monument?"

Phineas reached the house, stern of eye and voice. He went into the dining-room where his sister was awaiting him.

"What is it, dear boy!" she exclaimed, startled by his face.

"I just found Susan in the orchard crying as if her heart would break. What is the meaning of it?"

"Well, well, I want to know!" returned Polly musingly. "I thought so. I was sure of it."

"What were you sure of? Tell me at once."

"Mercy, Phineas! Don't be so hasty. I went out to the orchard to find Mr. Layton, because Emma wanted him to take her home, and there I found Susan laying down the law to him, and he looking as white as a cloth. I just suspected they'd had a quarrel, and now I am sure of it."

Phineas set his teeth as he bore the pain of the poisoned arrow that jealousy sent quivering into his heart. "That sounds serious, Polly," he said quietly; "and can there be any doubt that it is wrong for us to allow Susan to have a serious affair with any man in her mother's absence?" Poor Phineas. His interrogation was sincere. He was worn out with the endeavor to analyze himself, and to allow none of his selfish wishes to have power in his care of Susan. He longed to put the responsibility upon

Polly, to turn his back on it all and forget; but forgetfulness does not come at the bidding of a man who, when he has passed his thirty-fifth year, finds his heart filled for the first time by a woman's image. "I thought we decided, the last time we talked the matter over, that you were to be present when Mr. Layton made his visits?"

"So we did," said Polly, regarding him with a perplexed face; "and I have once or twice taken my work-basket out on to the piazza and sat with them; but, good land! when they start off I can't go trailing around the orchard and up into the woods, with a stocking in one hand and my basket under my arm. It would look forced. I shouldn't wonder one mite, Phineas," continued his sister, dropping her voice, and unable to keep out of it her womanly interest and pleasure in the announcement, "I believe Mr. Layton's in earnest."

Phineas took his seat at the table opposite the speaker. "Well, he must keep his earnestness to himself until Mrs. Cox comes back, if we can manage it. I wonder, Polly," — and again it was no figure of speech; Thorne did greatly wonder whether his vision was biased and Polly's true, — "I wonder this does not seem like a great breach of trust to you. The very danger which Mrs. Cox tried to avert in

sending her daughter to us has overtaken her here, and you accept the fact as complacently as if it were of no consequence."

"Why, you foolish boy!" returned Polly, coloring. "Why should you compare Mr. Layton, a gentleman, Leo Graham's friend, to the sort of travelling acquaintances Mrs. Cox objected to?"

"That is what he was — a travelling acquaintance of Susan's before she met him here."

"Well, but he has turned out to be all right, and I am sure Mrs. Cox couldn't ask for a more suitable husband for her. He's young and good-looking, has an honorable profession, and good expectations besides."

"Nevertheless, Mrs. Cox should be the one to pronounce upon all these advantages. Our business was to return her daughter to her heart-whole," returned Phineas. "I suspect there is plenty of romance in your head, Polly. Don't you think it is leading your judgment astray?"

Polly smiled and flushed. "Perhaps it is; but I am getting to like Susan, Phineas, and to wish her well. She has seemed so much gentler lately, and more thoughtful every way. I shall be real glad to see her happily engaged. Very few women have brothers to fill their hearts as you do mine, Phineas,

and for the others, I say let them get married. Now look at Emma Trowbridge. How much better off she would have been to marry! Then she wouldn't have been such an absurd hen with one chicken, as she has turned out. If you could have heard her talk here this morning, — well, I mustn't break confidence; but it was *simple*."

Thorne kept his eyes gloomily fixed on his plate. "We do not know what this Layton is, and we stand in Mrs. Cox's place to Susan," he said. "All that you are allowing may turn out for the girl's unhappiness rather than otherwise. I don't know what to do."

Polly looked at him solicitously. It was always her brother's way to assume other people's burdens and to look out for their interests, to sympathize in their perplexities and vigorously to lend a hand in lightening their cares; but very, very rarely had she heard him speak in a depressed tone, and to hear him admit that he did not know what to do was new indeed.

"Bless your dear heart!" she said earnestly; "you are really fretting over this thing. Don't you do it another instant. I will promise to be a regular dragon, and I will have a talk with Susan. If there is anything to find out, I will find it out, and I will

put the child on her honor. Poor girl! she's starving out there in the orchard all this time. I'll go and bring her in."

"Wait a minute; then you will be able to tell her I have gone, and she will come more willingly."

Polly settled back into her chair and drummed on the table musingly. "Don't you think, Phineas, we had better do a little something for all these young folks; have a picnic, or a fishing party, or something? We haven't done much to amuse Susan yet."

Thorne looked across at the speaker gravely. "I am glad you have come to like her," he said thoughtfully. "It speaks well for her, Polly."

"Oh, she is a flighty little thing,—just a sort of a pet; but she's showed lately that she's got some heart; and then, there's no denying it, she's got a way with her."

Phineas sighed involuntarily as he rose from the table. "You know what I mean, Phineas, don't you? It is hard to describe."

"Yes," returned the other shortly, "I know."

"And it develops girls to be in love," continued Polly, with a wise nod. "There is an overflow in their hearts that other folks feel the benefit of. That's why I believe that Susan may be so."

Thorne took the speaker's hands, and looked into

her eyes with a strange look, both pained and pleading. "Good-by, Polly, good little sister!"

"Good-by, dear," she returned in surprise. "You'll be home to supper?"

"Yes," said the other; adding as he turned away, "I will think of your picnic idea."

"That is right; do," replied Polly. She stood at the window and looked after him as he drove down the street, and an unusual tenderness for him brought the moisture into her eyes. "That's the best man the Lord ever made," was her mental observation.

CHAPTER XIII.

SUSAN GOES FISHING.

PHILIP LAYTON'S resentment at Susan's treatment was unfeigned and deep. Her unexpected tirade fell with a rude shock upon the ardor of his earnest intention, and the consciousness of reason in her scorn of herself and him, gave an added point to her stinging words. He was deeply vexed with her for marring the artistic *ensemble* of their friendship, for tearing away the veil from their romance by prosaic discussion of right and wrong, and he would have liked well to punish her by protracted neglect, but for the conviction that he, more than she, would be the sufferer by such a course.

As days went by and she made no sign of recall, the problem grew as to how he might best reopen relations with her without a sacrifice of his own dignity. He, the experienced man of the world, had no mind to humble himself before a young girl just out of school by going to her and owning that

her lecture had taken effect, and that he was now prepared to be good. He wished to be her hero; he wished to think and to decide for her. He was more charmed by her than he had ever been by any one, but he wished her to remain her saucy, graceful, amusing self, dependent upon him even while she coquetted; and now that he had determined to marry her he wished her to yield to him that simple-hearted worship which it is every man's ambition to win, most of all the ambition of men who least deserve it.

The peccadilloes which weighed so heavily on Susan's conscience annoyed him not at all, which was not surprising, considering his selfish, artistic temperament and his diverse experiences; but that part of the girl's speech in which she hotly denied previous escapades pleased him. He loved her, and he believed her, and his standard was not so high as to cause her fascinating imprudences to lower her in his eyes, since he himself had been her temptation.

In those days, while he was painfully supporting his dignity at The Eyrie, he was able to carry out Miss Trowbridge's wishes by making a third party with Irene and Leo in their talks, drives, and rambles, and he could and did truthfully tell his hostess that, so far as he could discover, his company was never unwelcome.

"They seem uncommonly congenial, those two," he admitted. "What one wishes the other accedes to eagerly. I never saw better comrades."

As this confirmed what Miss Trowbridge's common sense had day by day been impressing upon her, she smiled upon the young man cordially. "A very proper state of affairs," she said. "I hope they may always continue to be the best of friends. I hope you are feeling quite well, Mr. Layton. You have seemed a little quiet and preoccupied of late. I hope that does not proceed from ill-health."

"Thank you, I am entirely well, and I think you must have fancied the preoccupation, Miss Trowbridge," replied Philip, who had no intention of making a confidant at The Eyrie.

Meanwhile Miss Thorne had mustered courage to have the promised talk with Susan. She took advantage of the latter's softened state on the afternoon after Layton's visit, and opened the subject.

"Don't bother to-day about the dishes, Susan," she said kindly. "You sit right down there in the rocking-chair and let me talk to you a little bit about Mr. Layton. I want to know if he and you have quarrelled."

"Well, yes, we have; and I would very much

rather not talk about him," replied the girl rather unsteadily.

"I'm sure, dear child, I have all the respect in the world for your feelings," continued Polly hurriedly; "and if it wasn't for Phineas I should let things drift, probably too much; but he feels our responsibility of you so greatly, he thought I ought to talk to you."

Susan had Bijou in her lap, idly drawing her hands along his silky ears. Suddenly she burst into the most spontaneous ripple of laughter. "Do come here, Miss Polly," she cried; "see how savage I can make Bijou look by holding his ears this way."

Miss Thorne took her hands from the dish-water and regarded the girl in amazement. This levity was an acute disappointment to her. It was so evidently unfeigned.

"Susan, it is all very well for you to laugh and play; but I want to know if you think it is honorable for you not to be open and above-board with me in this Layton matter. I don't want to forbid the man the house, but I am afraid I ought to until your mother gets back, unless you tell me honestly all about him, — what he means by his attentions, and all that. I can't have Phineas' life worn out of him, and his appetite all taken away, about a matter that

you are not deeply interested in after all. You couldn't laugh over a dog's ears if you had the heartache!"

This was Polly's grievance. Had Susan admitted the heartache and been pensive, how Miss Thorne could have enjoyed petting and cherishing her!

The girl looked at her with wide-open eyes. Once she would have snubbed this mentor peremptorily; but there was a development for the better feebly going on in Susan. She was less self-confident than of yore.

"I want to be open and above-board," she said simply.

"Now that's clever of you, my dear," replied Miss Thorne, leaving the dishes and coming to sit beside the young girl. "Now you tell me just what you think I ought to tell you if it were my mother who had gone away and left me in your care."

Susan's eyes sparkled merrily as they rested on the speaker's fair, plump face. "Well, if that were the case, and Deacon Elder would persist in coming to see you, I think I should inquire into it."

Deacon Elder was an old flame of Miss Thorne's, and it was generally believed in Proctor that he had remained a bachelor for her sake. She blushed, but remained grave.

"Well," she said simply, "it would be my duty to tell you everything. Now begin."

Susan became serious, and held Bijou up before her reddening face. "Well, it began in Venice. I think we were especially attracted to one another at once," she said.

"Yes?" replied Polly, the monosyllable most expressive of interest.

"Then meeting again in a quiet place like this, where neither he nor I had anything to do, it was natural that he should seek me a great deal, and that I should welcome the diversion he made for me."

"Only too natural," agreed Polly eagerly.

"Well — that is about all."

"No, indeed, it is not," said Miss Thorne; "you have but just led up to the kernel of the matter. My dear, does he seem interested?"

"Yes, rather."

"How seriously?"

"That is a conundrum which I am forced to give up."

Miss Thorne looked at the speaker with unsated curiosity.

"I am not so foolish, so wicked I might almost say, as to expect you to let me look into your heart, Susan," she continued after a pause; "but I really

think you ought to tell me how the matter stands on his side. Does he — does he make *love* to you?"

As Polly asked this her face flushed as red as Susan's. The latter danced Bijou on his hind legs on her lap a moment before she said reluctantly, —

"I — suppose so."

"You suppose so!" Miss Thorne's eyes danced with excitement. "It seems to me, if there is anything a girl might be expected to be sure of, it is that. How does he do it? I am sure it is my duty to know all about it now."

"What a question!" replied Susan with an impatient laugh. "How did Deacon Elder do it?"

"It's not necessary to revive antiquities. Tell me, my child."

"That I shall not, I am sure," returned Susan with spirit. It was a sore subject to her just then.

"Then she is as much in earnest as he is," thought Miss Thorne, not without some secret exultation mingled with her dismay. "Think of your mother, my dear," she said aloud, "and think of us. She will hold us responsible. Do promise me, Susan, to put Mr. Layton off until she comes home. It will not be very long now. He is a most agreeable, good-looking young man. I do not wonder in the least at your preference, and when your mother

comes home I have no doubt she will give her consent —"

"Oh, wait, Miss Polly; there is no talk yet of anybody's consent. I told you we had quarrelled. Mr. Layton may even leave Proctor without seeing me again. He was very angry when he went away."

"And should you let him go?" asked Miss Thorne wonderingly.

"Surely," answered Susan briefly.

Polly could make nothing of her. As she told Phineas that night in their confidential half-hour before retiring, she was completely puzzled. Susan was evidently deeply interested in Layton, and she had admitted that he had made love to her; but they had quarrelled, and in spite of it Susan was gay and cheerful. It was incomprehensible.

Phineas did not say much in answer to her confidences. "The longer their quarrel lasts the better," he observed. "It is the safest condition for matters to be in for the present." He could not attempt any solution of Polly's problem.

His own problem bade fair at times to prove too intricate for him. He eagerly caught at the idea which flashed across his brain that it would be no more than right for him to take a little extra pains to amuse Susan, and thereby perhaps postpone the

return of her admirer. His sister's suggestion of a picnic was hardly in order now, as such a project must include the family at The Eyrie, and would consequently bring Susan and Layton face to face.

It had come to be the girl's daily habit to go to the gate with Phineas when he left in the morning, to give Jenny a few lumps of sugar before she started on her day's work. The result was that the intelligent mare grew to watch for her coming, and would whinny if she was late, a proceeding which delighted Susan, who never looked prettier to Thorne than when she was gently stroking and talking to his horse.

The next morning, while he was pulling on his gloves and Susan was giving her new pet the sugar, Thorne glanced over the sky.

"It is my opinion, Susan," he said, "that the fish would bite this afternoon."

"They would not bite my hook if they were starving. I never caught a fish in my life."

"Then you shall this afternoon if you will come with me."

"What! are you going to take time to go fishing?" asked Susan incredulously.

"If you would like to go."

"Of course I should. Will Miss Polly come?"

"She says no. I have just asked her."

Susan entered into the plan with heartiness, and soon after dinner she and Phineas started for the lake. They procured a boat, and Thorne pulled out across the blue water with strong, sturdy strokes that met with his companion's approval.

"How well you row!" she remarked.

"Thank you, Miss Farley," he returned with a bright smile.

"Well, you know some people do row like windmills," she explained.

"I can give you a compliment too," returned Thorne. "You know enough to trim a boat; you do not lean over and paddle your fingers in the water."

"What ought you to expect of a Chicago girl? I have been told that there are not many places where I know how to behave; but I do flatter myself that a boat is one of the few. After a while, though, when we are anchored, I shall paddle my fingers, I love to."

"Ah, indeed! I suspect the reasons will slowly transpire why you never get any fish."

"Oh, I see," laughed Susan; "you are going to be one of the enthusiasts who won't let a person breathe after the line is thrown. I do not know the finger alphabet, and I must talk."

"This is your excursion," returned Thorne; "it

shall be whichever you choose, talk and paddle, or fish."

All this time he was allowing himself the full enjoyment of gazing at the happy face under the bewitching hat. Susan wore daring hats, but they always became her and lent her a picturesque air.

"It seems to me you do everything well," she observed, looking at him anxiously.

Thorne colored like a boy at the compliment, in spite of the tone of voice in which it was said, which gave it a somewhat uncomplimentary flavor after all.

"There is The Eyrie," cried the girl, catching sight of the house. "I wonder where Irene is. I do not see nearly enough of her."

"Miss Flanders is much occupied, I suppose. I wish, too, we might see her oftener. I admire her very much."

"Do you?" said Susan, looking at him wistfully.

He did not answer at once. He was thinking how exquisite her face looked with that unconscious, thoughtful expression.

"Yes, indeed," he responded at last; "surely every one must. The impression she makes upon one is so broad and reposeful. I believe she is a noble young woman."

"Oh, you are perfectly right!" exclaimed Susan,

clasping her hands, her eyes absolutely filling with tears as she spoke; "and I do so want to be a noble young woman, too."

Thorne dropped the oars, and they drifted. "Well, why not?" he said gravely. "What should prevent you?"

"Nothing but myself. I get in my own way. I interfere," replied Susan smiling through her tears. "I have never had any trouble until this summer, but Irene has lifted me out of my comfortable groove, and bidden me follow a path where high lights are forever falling on every little pleasure and indulgence, and destroying my comfort in them."

"You are blessed in having such a friend, and still more blessed in the pure vision that enables you to see the right when it is pointed out to you," returned her companion, bending again to his oars.

"My highest ambition," said Susan humbly, "is to be like Irene."

"You will never be like her."

Susan looked up in an injured fashion. "You cannot be sure."

"The wish is father to the thought, perhaps. I admire Miss Flanders, but I cannot afford to lose Miss Farley."

Miss Farley's downcast face lifted and brightened at this, like a flower in the sunlight.

"And you never flatter, either," she said slowly.

Thorne shook his head.

"You scold sometimes," nodding wisely.

"You mean I used to. Of course all necessity for that is over now that you have taken your own training in hand, as I once advised you; but you know I stand in a — a father's place to you this summer."

The laugh with which Susan greeted this was music to her companion's ears. "What airs you put on!" she remarked characteristically; but in her new state of humiliation, she was touched into deep gratitude toward him for his valuation of her. It was not as though Philip Layton had said it. That would have been a matter of course, and his handsome eyes would have added their soft eloquence and made the declaration doubly expressive; but it would not have filled her with such trustful happiness as she felt now. Poor Susan! she was egotistical and vain, but it was an honest sentiment of thankfulness that pervaded her at the thought that Phineas Thorne would not wish to have her individuality merged in that of Irene Flanders. She thought of it with doubtful wonder, very far removed from her usual

self-assurance, and because she must believe it, it gave her new courage.

Phineas, having reached his destination, cast anchor, and then proceeded to prepare a fishing-rod for his companion. "I must be very particular about this," he said. "I have promised that if you follow my directions you shall hook a fish, and there must not be any mistake."

He threw the line, and then placed the rod in Susan's hands.

"Now I shall gaze at the float with the most confident expectations for half an hour," she said, "and then I shall begin to yawn and look about me, and wish you would suggest going home. I know all about it, you see. I have had experience."

"You shall suggest going home yourself as soon as the wish comes into your mind. I am absolutely at your orders this afternoon," replied Thorne, unreeling his own line.

"What fun!" remarked the girl demurely. "How refreshing to think of ordering you about! Probably I am the only person in Proctor who ever had that privilege. It is always, 'Oh, Mr. Thorne, will you tell me what ought to be done in this matter, and what I ought to do in that case?' and 'Mr. Thorne, could you spare time to look at this and that to

morrow, and give me your advice upon it?' Even Miss Polly can only say, 'Now what do *you* think about it Phineas?'"

Thorne laughed aloud at the imitation of his sister's care-laden tone.

"But I shall simply gesture, so, and say, 'We will go home now. Get ready at —' Oh, oh! Mr. Thorne, I've got something! Why, it's a perfect *whale!*" cried Susan, struggling with the rod in wild excitement.

"Hold on! hold on!" warned Phineas, passing the handle of his pole under the seat.

"Hold on! I should say so. He may drag me in, but I'll *never* let him go. Lose him, indeed! What, he hasn't — don't tell me so!"

"Yes, he is gone," replied Thorne, lifting the unresisting line. I ought to have told you when you get a strong bite like that, to unlock your reel and let the fish have more line. That was probably a bass."

"No, I hardly think so," replied Susan firmly. "Do bass grow to a great size? That was a very, *very* large fish. He nearly pulled me in. I should like to know what it was, but I never shall now."

"The bass is very gamey sometimes," remarked Phineas, smiling as he baited her hook afresh and threw it into the water.

"Well, that was a tricky creature. Oh, Mr. Thorne, I begin to believe you. I *shall* catch a fish," and Susan's eyes sparkled and her cheeks glowed in such fashion that Phineas forgot his own love of the sport and watched alternately the face of his companion and the float on which her eyes were fixed. "Draw your rod along toward the side slowly," he suggested. She obeyed, and, wonderful to relate, down bobbed the float again, and again she experienced the joyful sensation of jerk and strain upon the line.

"Unfasten the reel!" cried Phineas; but Susan had lost her head altogether. She turned and fell upon her knees in the bottom of the boat with her back to the prey and the rod held firmly over her shoulder.

"Don't let him go!" she said peremptorily. "I'll never forgive you if I lose him. Catch him! pull him into the boat!"

Meanwhile Thorne had sprung to the reel, and, succeeding in wresting the pole from Susan's desperate clutch, who seemed under the impression that it was the fish who was thus depriving her, he did finally secure the bass.

Susan slowly turned and examined it in fearful admiration as it lay gasping at her feet.

"I caught it. Just think of it!" she said in an awed tone.

"I am thinking of it. I am almost overcome by it," he replied, shaking with laughter.

"It is a very good size, is it not? Eight or nine pounds, I should say."

"Well — hardly. It is a very nice fish, and not to be despised at supper time."

"Indeed! I am glad of that. What do you think it weighs?"

"About two and a half, probably."

Susan looked at him in injured surprise. "I do not believe it. How can you tell by looking at it?"

"I may be mistaken, of course," said the other meekly.

Susan was appeased, and again her line was thrown and her attention concentrated upon it. Perhaps ten minutes had passed when Thorne had a bite, and as soon as his companion observed it she dropped her own rod to clasp her hands and offer voluble advice.

"Look out for your pole! Can you take the oar and get it?" asked Phineas, dividing his attention between his splashing prize and the neglected rod which had just slid gently into the water. But Susan had not boasted. She was at home in a boat, and

she lifted an oar from the rowlock and coaxed back the rod just as Thorne brought his bass in.

She looked at the fish eagerly. There was no doubt of it. It was larger than hers. "What luck we are having!" she said in rather a disappointed tone.

"Yes, we have hit upon a good day. What fish do you catch with a rod in Lake Michigan?" asked her companion, when their lines were dropped again.

"I never caught anything; but I have seen other people catch whole strings of these little perch. They do not amount to much. They only weigh a pound or two."

"Yes; I have heard that a good many perch will weigh a pound."

"I dare say," returned Susan unsuspiciously. "Look over there, Mr. Thorne. Is that somebody waving to us? It is. They are pulling this way. It is Irene and Mr. Graham, and — oh, yes, Mr. Layton," she finished, suddenly disconcerted.

But she and Thorne both waved their handkerchiefs to greet the approaching boat, and she scarcely allowed the party to come within earshot before she addressed them gayly:

"Are you fishing too? This is the place. Such luck as we are having!"

"Indeed!" returned Graham with interest, as he came around on the side farthest from their rods. "We have not tried it to-day. We were out yesterday."

"Did you catch any, Irene?"

"I caught four," returned the latter proudly.

Irene was rosy with her out-of-door life, and looked the incarnation of health and happiness.

"Four! Oh, dear! Do you hear that, Mr. Thorne? I must catch four."

"How many already, Miss Farley?" asked Graham.

"Well," reluctantly, "only one yet; but then we have only been here a short time comparatively, and," impressively, "you just ought to have seen my fish that got away."

Leo laughed. "Miss Farley, we all know him. We have all lost him. A sonnet should be written to 'The fish that got away!' He was very large, was he not?"

"Large! He was as strong as I am. Why don't you tell them about him, Mr. Thorne?"

"Why, really, I did not see him, you know. I did not even feel him. He was off when I took the rod."

"Yes. I do not want to blame you at all, Mr.

Thorne," said Susan very earnestly and sweetly, "but wasn't it perhaps something in the way you took the rod that let him get off?"

"I think he was lightly hooked," suggested Phineas.

"Well, perhaps," assented Susan magnanimously. "I do not think," turning to the occupants of the other boat, "that Mr. Thorne believes me when I say how heavy he was; but really, when he nearly pulled my arms out, and I weigh one hundred and ten, it seems only reasonable to suppose, as I do, that he weighed at least fifteen pounds himself. Mr. Thorne thinks it was a bass. Why, dear me! *these* are bass," pointing at the gasping fish.

"And weren't those very exciting while they were still under water?" asked Irene, smiling.

"They did very well," admitted Susan, and Thorne laughed reminiscently.

"It is fortunate we found you," said Leo, "for we have been deciding among ourselves at home that it is high time we had a picnic, and we were coming to learn if your household would not join us."

"Isn't it kind of Mr. Graham, when he hates picnics?" asked Irene of the company generally.

"Nonsense! You know I told you I became converted as soon as you mentioned the subject," said

Graham quickly. "My idea is that we go up the river in my launch and have lunch on the shore."

This scheme met with enthusiastic approval from Susan and quiet acceptance from Phineas, who saw that there was no chance now of the postponement of a reconciliation between Susan and Layton. The latter had sat in silence after the first bow of greeting, and seemed determined that advances, if they came, must proceed from the other side; but Miss Farley felt an undercurrent of certainty that he was constraining himself, and that, as he had remained in the village, he had no intention of ignoring her long.

The friends chatted among themselves for some time, and settled upon a day for the picnic; but no more fish were taken.

"You have frightened them," observed Susan; "and so, of course, you cannot wonder if I do not compete with Irene's four to-day."

"We will go right away," replied Irene. "There is too much noise here altogether. You will find a surprise awaiting you at home, Susan," she finished, with a smiling nod, as Leo and Philip took up their oars.

This hint absorbed Susan more and more as time went on and the fish continued to prove shy. After

Thorne had caught one more, she proposed that they should return and discover to what Irene could refer.

Phineas was glad to perceive that Layton's changed manner had in no degree communicated itself to his companion. She continued lively and pleased on the way home, and entered the house carrying the three bass depending from a stick. She proudly displayed them to Miss Thorne, and then inquired eagerly what surprise was in store for her.

"I don't know," replied Polly, "unless it is an invitation to a party at The Eyrie that came soon after you went away. Emma generally does give one if she is at home on Leo's birthday."

Susan's eyes shone as she read her invitation, and her mind immediately reverted to a certain chest of gowns at home, and she tried to make a mental choice between them. Phineas came in just then.

"Do you think you should like me in corn color?" she demanded laughingly.

"I am afraid I should," he returned dryly.

"Oh, you need not be afraid. It is an exploded notion that blondes cannot wear corn color. I am a symphony in that yellow dress. I believe I shall send for it to wear to Miss Trowbridge's party."

"Aha! a party is it? Send for the symphony by all means."

"It is not a symphony until I get into it; but I have a pale green gown that is a dream."

"Why isn't one of those white dresses you have here just the thing? I am sure nothing could be more becoming."

Susan gave him a pitying glance. "Wait till you see me in the dream."

"Oh, spare me!" There was a true ring in the jest, but Susan did not perceive it. She gave him a pensive look which seemed to see far beyond him.

"I have decided on the green," she said.

CHAPTER XIV.

MISS TROWBRIDGE'S CHOICE.

THAT "not impossible she" to whom Susan once lightly referred in her talk with Layton as the fate whom Graham's aunt intended for him, was not so visionary a mortal as many supposed.

Deep within her own bosom Emma Trowbridge cherished the conviction that she had found the proper wife for her nephew, in the person of a Miss Bertha Alden, whom she and Leo had frequently met during the past winter in Boston.

Miss Trowbridge meant in her matchmaking to be as wise as a serpent, and as harmless as a dove. Wise as a serpent, inasmuch as she would not fall into the error of talking much of the girl to her nephew, thereby rousing the innate contrariness of human nature; and harmless as a dove, inasmuch as she determined not to crystallize into obstinacy in the matter, but if, every opportunity being given him for falling in love with Miss Alden, Leo should

prefer another young woman of equal position, she would yield to him gracefully.

Leo's plan for the summer ramble in Switzerland had given her an added pang in the fact of its preventing her from taking him with her to whatever point the Aldens should elect as the place to spend the hot months; and the vague suggestions she had thrown out, since his return, of a trip to the salt water, had had for an ulterior object as much the seeking of Miss Alden as the parting from Irene Flanders.

Week followed week, and as Miss Trowbridge's health was undeniably good, the weather unusually cool, and the young people at The Eyrie absolutely content, there seemed no excuse for making a change, and the mistress of the house was fain to compose herself as best she might, expending some uncomfortable wonder as to what masculine beings were devoting themselves to the fair Bertha, and consoled only by the negative condition of affairs at home.

One morning it suddenly appeared to her that virtue is truly its own reward, for as she was driving to market she was amazed by the apparition of Bertha Alden herself, driving with a lady whom Miss Trowbridge knew by sight as the owner of one of the

summer residences about half a mile from her own house.

Miss Alden recognized her with a bright smile and a bow, and Miss Trowbridge, glowing with pleasure, stopped her carriage, upon which the young girl's companion followed the example, and a cordial exchange of civilities ensued.

The elderly lady was introduced to Miss Trowbridge as Miss Alden's cousin, Mrs. Courtney. The latter hoped Miss Trowbridge would call upon them soon, as she feared not to be able to induce her young relative to remain long in so quiet a place; upon which Miss Trowbridge hoped Mrs. Courtney would excuse her for failing to seek her acquaintance sooner, but really she was scarcely in the habit of visiting at all in Proctor. During the few months in the year which she spent in her native village she lived the quietest of quiet lives; but it would give her the utmost pleasure to make the acquaintance of any friend of her dear Miss Bertha's.

"And I hope I may bring my nephew," she added, turning to the young lady, who lifted her eyebrows in polite surprise.

"I understood that Mr. Graham was abroad," she replied.

Miss Trowbridge felt a little shock of disappoint-

ment. She had hoped, in her swift first thoughts, that Leo had had some influence in bringing Bertha Alden to Proctor.

"His friend fell ill, — Philip Layton, the artist, you know," she explained; "so Leo remained at home with him, and now has brought him here for perfect rest. He has quite recovered."

"Ah, Mr. Layton here too? Certainly I should be pleased to see Mr. Graham again. So glad to have met you, Miss Trowbridge;" and after more parting words and smiles, the two carriages rolled on their respective ways.

"Miss Trowbridge is quite a different person from my imagined picture of her," observed Mrs. Courtney. "I am sure she is cordiality itself."

"I have always found her so," replied Bertha; "a little effusive even. Why, is that not her reputation?"

"Oh, no," Mrs. Courtney laughed. "They tell very absurd stories here about her and her nephew."

"Well, there is nothing absurd about either of them." Miss Alden spoke with autocratic finality.

"Indeed? Very likely. You see, she is the money-eyed woman of the place, and she has grown up here. She is set on a hill in more than one sense. I think I have seen her nephew in his boat, a tall, fair young man."

"Yes, he is rather striking in appearance," the girl replied; then she changed the subject.

It was like Bertha, Mrs. Courtney knew, not to inquire into the anecdotes at which the latter had hinted. Miss Trowbridge and her nephew were her friends, and it would not enter Miss Alden's mind that any gossip concerning persons whose acquaintance had been accepted by her father, her mother, and herself could be other than foolish and false.

Miss Trowbridge's marketing on that day would have been performed in an ill-chosen, random fashion but for the alertness and forethought of her marketman, who always knew what was due to herself and her family, even when she became careless.

Her excitement continued during the drive home. Fate had been very good to her.

"Irene says that she does not believe that anything *happens*," she reflected, "and this does seem almost a providence; but I must be cautious. I must be very careful not to be too enthusiastic."

As she approached the house she saw that Irene was seated on the porch reading aloud to the two young men, who lay in neighboring hammocks. Miss Trowbridge smiled as she joined the group.

"You lazy, luxurious boys!" she said. "Irene, why do you allow them to impose upon you?"

"She does not. Do not worry," returned Layton. "She makes us take our turns."

"Not but that they are a trifle shorter than hers," acknowledged Graham.

"Still, discipline is maintained, you see," said Irene. "How well you look, Miss Trowbridge! as if a headache would never dare pounce upon you again. Aren't you going to sit down with us? I will tell you the story as far as we have read."

Miss Trowbridge sank into a reclining-chair and used her fan. "Thank you, that will be very nice; but first I want Leo to guess whom I just met in the village."

"Aunt Emma, you know I draw the line at guessing," was her nephew's lazy response.

"You never would be able to guess, I admit; so I will tell you, — Miss Bertha Alden."

Graham gave a long, soft whistle. "What an apparition for Proctor!"

"Yes, indeed. She is visiting her cousin, Mrs. Courtney, who lives in the red-roofed cottage that was finished this spring. She is her cousin."

"It was very thoughtless of you to meet her, Aunt Emma, for now we shall have to go and call. Can I wear this shirt?"

Miss Trowbridge looked at him with a mixture of

fondness and vexation. His mischievous face looked boyish above the white flannel shirt and broad soft silk tie in which he luxuriated. She did not wish to smile, but she was forced to for very admiration of him.

"If you think it would be respectful to — Mrs. Courtney," she replied.

"Ah, Aunt Emma, you are deep," he remarked, and she colored. She only hoped she was sufficiently so.

"Think how fortunate," she went on, "that we have two pleasure parties already arranged, — the picnic and your birthday!"

Leo threw back the sides of his hammock. "You don't say she must come to the picnic!" he exclaimed in such genuine dismay that Miss Trowbridge cast a side-glance at Irene, over whose attentive face an evident cloud had fallen.

"You do surprise me beyond measure, Leo," she said. "I thought you would be so pleased at the opportunity of doing some little thing for the loveliest girl in Boston, whose family have been so kind to you."

"But this was to have been a home affair, you know. That is all. It alters the complexion of it to have two strangers added. It makes it formal at

once." Here Graham caught Irene's expressive glance. He had learned to understand that particular look. "But since you wish it, Aunt Emma, that is enough," he finished rather precipitately, and then frowned at Irene because she had not supported him. She shook her head quickly.

"Is Miss Alden really the loveliest girl in Boston?" she asked Miss Trowbridge.

"I should think it hardly an exaggeration," replied the latter.

"Do describe her," begged Irene. "She must be far more interesting than the heroine we have been reading of. Is she not, Leo?"

It was the first time the name had slipped out when they were not alone; but in their constant informal companionship it had of late been impossible always to remember the conventional mode of address. She had felt that Miss Trowbridge would prefer her to continue the formality, so she had tried to hold to it; and although Miss Trowbridge marked the slip, and locked it in her memory as a fact against Irene, the girl herself was unconscious of her blunder. She looked at Miss Trowbridge expectantly.

"As you will probably see her," replied the latter, fanning herself energetically, "it is hardly worth while to go into detail."

"I will tell you, Irene," volunteered Graham. "Miss Alden is a very carefully cultivated creature, — mentally, morally, and physically. Her mother brought her up with a book of directions in one hand. Miss Alden, throughout her girlhood, slept and ate and drank beef-tea at stated hours from which there was no departure. She was never for five minutes free from conscientious supervision, in fact she never is now. The same nurse who hushed her to sleep at the tender age of six months is with her in Proctor to-day. Her parents determined to make her the demonstration of faultless bringing up —"

"And is she not?" interrupted Miss Trowbridge. "She has absolute health, with all that it implies; steady nerves, and cool, well-balanced mind. Is that an attainment not worth struggling for?"

"It is the greatest, I am sure." The heartiness of Irene's tone made Miss Trowbridge turn to her. It was absolutely necessary that she should unburden her mind now, and into a sympathetic ear.

"Added to that, judge of her attractiveness when I tell you that her figure is upright and graceful, her brown hair beautifully thick and curling, her eyes bright brown, her teeth dazzlingly white and even, and her cheeks and lips rosy. Have I exaggerated, Leo?"

"Not in the least, Aunt Emma. Her complexion always makes me think of the unchanging tints in porcelain. I suppose nothing moves her, because she has been taught her superiority so assiduously, — and she is superior. Every one acknowledges that."

Miss Trowbridge swallowed her displeasure at this speech, which was partially atoned for by the heartfelt manner in which Irene declared that she did not know whether most to long or to dread to meet so perfect a being. Possibly she did not feel so much temerity as she professed; but her intense loyalty to Miss Trowbridge made her anxious to gratify all her whims, and Miss Alden was evidently a cult with her hostess.

"You shall meet her," said Miss Trowbridge graciously. "We will do all we can for her entertainment."

CHAPTER XV.

THE RUINED MILL.

THE weather this summer was certainly obliging. There was life in the breeze that ruffled the lake on the morning set for the excursion. The steam-launch was gay with silk streamers, and its nickel mountings shone in the sunlight as the little party went on board.

It was a mercy, Miss Trowbridge felt, that good Polly Thorne had been prevented at the last minute from coming, because she knew that she should have been obliged to leave her quite to her own resources on account of the strangers for whose pleasure she felt responsible.

Miss Alden and her cousin were the last to arrive. Irene had given Susan a rapid sketch of the honored guest, and both girls gave the Boston beauty an eager scrutiny as she came slowly down to the boat.

She looked charming in her suit of dark-green cloth, and her passive manner indicated that she had

so far found mere existence on her part to be sufficient return to those who offered what they could to contribute to her enjoyment.

Susan had watched her with her hostess but a very short time before discovering the intentions which Miss Trowbridge imagined were buried so deep from human suspicion. This *empressement*, this marked cordiality, this frequent referring of questions to Leo, could mean but one thing to the sharp young woman who had experienced the opposite treatment. She gave a light sigh of regret as she glanced at Irene; but she had a more personal question to absorb her just now, and that was what sort of behavior would be likely to follow the extremely elegant bow with which Mr. Layton had greeted her own arrival at The Eyrie.

As the little steamer puffed away from the landing, Layton stood beside Miss Alden. His fame as an artist was sufficient to have reached her, and she was pleased to meet him, and listened to his remarks with her pretty, passive smile. Layton eagerly recognized the unexpectedly good opportunity for making Miss Farley suffer the pangs of jealousy, and expended his best efforts to amuse his fair companion; but Susan, if she suffered, was no less than Spartan in her heroism.

As Irene approached her seat, she held out a welcoming hand, and her face expressed only pleasure.

"Isn't this perfectly delightful, Irene? Come and sit down. At last we are doing something together, and I propose to claim my share of your society today. I will not be cheated out of it."

"No one will dispute your claims," replied the other, taking the offered seat. "As Mr. Graham says, this cannot be a family party now, and so you and I will be left to our own resources."

"I am willing," replied Susan.

"And I. It is perfect entertainment to glide so smoothly through this clear air and water."

"And you might be a little glad to visit with me," suggested Susan.

"You know I am."

Susan shook her head slowly. "No, you are quite self-sufficient;" then, as she saw her companion looked troubled, she added, "and I would not have you otherwise, for then you would not be yourself. Irene, would it gratify you to know that you have done me a great deal of good this summer?" she continued, after a thoughtful pause.

"Why, Susan, I do not understand you, but of course I am glad."

"Do you remember the afternoon about two weeks

ago when we took the long walk in the woods, and discussed so many subjects?"

"Yes. I feared afterward that I had been very egotistical with you, especially as my views are nearly always theoretical."

"Did you? Well, you have been a kind of thorn in my side all summer, Irene, but you did something besides make a vague impression that day. You convinced me."

"Of what?"

"Oh, that would be too long a story, and unnecessarily humiliating to me," replied Susan with a smile. "Be satisfied with the fact that you have worked a reform."

"You are very kind to me, Susan," returned the other simply. "How good it is that our blunders are sometimes in the right direction! Do you think we ought to join Miss Alden? No, Mr. Graham is going to her now. I began to believe he and Mr. Thorne were intending to prolong their interview indefinitely."

"Miss Trowbridge would not have endured it very long," observed Susan.

"Of course she is anxious that he should be very attentive to his guest," returned Irene quickly.

Susan laughed. "How quickly you are on the

defensive if you suspect any one of criticizing your beloved entertainer! Bless your heart, I was not saying anything against her. So she makes you as happy and as welcome as ever, does she?" added Susan, with a scrutinizing look into her companion's face.

"Yes, it seems like home to me," returned Irene heartily. "They are all so kind. Sometimes I find it hard to realize that a few months ago I had never seen them, and that a few months hence I shall have slipped out of their lives, — although not, I hope, out of their remembrance. I am too fond of them to be willing to believe that."

Susan's sharp eyes failed to detect any consciousness or lack of candor in her friend's face or manner.

"How about Mr. Layton?" she asked. "Is he included in your generalization?"

"He is a part of all the pleasantness. His work and his talk about it are very interesting. He does not seem like himself of late;" and Irene raised her eyebrows interrogatively and smiled at her friend. "What have you been doing to him?"

"The same thing you did to me. Reforming him — or trying to," returned Susan.

"It does not seem to have agreed with him so well as it did with you," laughed Irene, to whom Miss

Trowbridge had confided a conviction that the artist had been refused by "that pert Chicago girl."

Irene had never come so close to a possible romance, and she would have liked to know the facts in the case. She did not believe that Layton would experience a refusal and then linger in the village in order to treat his hard-hearted lady with marked coolness; and she knew that Susan would not be making this excursion to-day with a freshly rejected suitor. She believed they had quarrelled, and since Miss Trowbridge had put it into her head that Mr. Layton's sentiments were so serious, she romantically desired the pair to become reconciled. Philip gained a double interest to her as somebody's lover, and she felt the warm desire to see him made happy, which is innate in the breast of match-making humanity.

She looked around at him, where he remained persistently beside Miss Alden, notwithstanding the fact that Leo now claimed her attention.

"It is very nice of Mr. Layton to show so much attention to Miss Alden," she said to Susan. "It is a compliment to Miss Trowbridge which I am sure she will appreciate."

Susan burst into a contagious laugh. "Do you think so, Irene?" she asked teasingly, glancing over at Miss Trowbridge and noting that lady's uneasy

division of attention between Mrs. Courtney and the trio of young people. "I believe she could dispense with Mr. Layton;" and again the laugh bubbled over.

Irene frowned and smiled at the speaker. "You laugh at me altogether too often, Miss Farley. What is there so amusing in what I said?"

"You are delicious, Irene!" was all the explanation Susan would vouchsafe.

Philip Layton heard her laughter, and ground his teeth together. He saw Phineas Thorne cross the boat and join the two girls, but obstinacy kept him in his place until the launch stopped at a lonely landing at the head of the lake. One now saw that the latter was but the widening of a river whose wild, wooded bank was the destination of the picnickers.

Layton, as they were walking among the trees, managed with elaborate carelessness to find himself next to Susan. "Your parasol is surely useless now," he said to her; "let me carry it."

Susan looked at him in her alert fashion. "Well, we have not philopened, so I believe there is no danger," she returned, as she handed it to him.

The ice was broken. Layton drew a breath of relief. The past week had shown him that this brusque girl was even more necessary to his happiness than he had supposed.

"Walk slowly," he begged. "I am out of breath. Miss Alden simply won't talk."

"And you come to me as a specimen of the opposite extreme," remarked Susan, "and expect to become rested in my society."

"That has hitherto been the invariable effect."

The girl nodded approvingly. "It is worth while to give you an opportunity to say a nice thing. You always use it well."

Layton felt grateful to her for making it so easy for him.

"Is this not picturesque?" she continued. "I suspect you will have to take a few sketches back with you."

Layton caught her eye as she said this, and her face flushed under his look.

"Do you not think you owe me a pose?" he asked.

"Yes, I do," she replied promptly, "and I promise to win your praise as the most patient and quiet of models at any time you set."

All this was very flattering, and Layton accepted it as his just due; but he was conscious of a change in Susan. She was frank and cordial, more so, if anything, than of old; but he felt the subtle difference in her manner, and hardly knew whether to be amused, or pleased, or vexed by it.

Phineas and Irene were walking immediately ahead of them, and the latter was surprised just now to have her question regarding a ruined mill they were passing receive only a blank glance from her companion.

"Excuse me," he said. "I just overheard Susan consenting to pose for Mr. Layton."

The expression of Thorne's face surprised Irene.

"I did not know you disliked Mr. Layton," she said.

"Neither did I," he returned; "I have no reason to do so. I was a little startled because they have not been on friendly terms of late, — but that is over now."

There was little in the words, but there was so much in Thorne's white face, and in the effort with which he gathered himself together in the closing words of his sentence, that his companion read his secret.

It caused her extreme surprise and bewilderment, and as she walked on in silence the pain at Phineas' heart seemed reflected in her own. His case was so hopeless. She respected him so highly. It seemed the height of insolence in her to have detected what she was sure was meant for no confidant, not even for Susan herself; but she managed to repeat her

question concerning the mill, and this time Phineas answered her.

When the party arrived at the pretty, wooded bluff which had been chosen as headquarters for the day, Irene was glad to stand alone a moment to collect her thoughts.

She regarded Susan with curiosity not unmixed with resentment. How could a girl have two men in love with her at the same time and not be to some extent responsible for it? If responsible for it, must she not be conscious of it? If conscious of it, was Susan not selfish and heartless to be laughing and chatting in her usual irresponsible, light fashion? The gayety of her face at the present moment, as she assisted Layton to spread a shawl upon the grass, contrasted painfully with the look Irene had seen in Thorne's eyes.

She was startled by Graham's voice. "What is it, Irene? You look as though you had seen a ghost."

Irene glanced up at his smiling face. "I have," she said solemnly.

"What do you mean? Have I found you at last as I hoped never to find you, — unhappy?" Leo's smile had vanished, and he had the strong, kind, protective air which in their pleasant comradeship he seldom had occasion for, but which, when he did as-

sume it, gave Irene the pleasantest sense of being cared for that she had ever experienced.

"I am not unhappy for myself," she replied slowly.

"For the ghost, then?"

"Yes," she admitted, still more slowly; then she added, "but I must not talk about it. I have reason to be more than usually content to-day, for I have a letter from my father."

"Ah! Let us sit down then, for of course you are going to read it to me."

Leo had become by this time pretty well acquainted with Mr. Flanders, and although at first he found the letters which Irene received from her father to be a sensitive subject with her, owing to their rarity and brevity, it had come to be permissible for him to inquire into their contents, and even to jest with her on their telegraphic nature.

She smiled as she took the seat he indicated. "This one is no longer than the others," she said, "but it is important, because it tells me that he sails for home in about three weeks, and that if Miss Trowbridge will kindly keep me that much longer, he will come here for me on his arrival." Irene's face became overcast. "Do you think I had better let him do that?" she added, while Leo was mentally con-

gratulating Richard Flanders on the possession of extraordinarily tough sensibilities.

He paused a moment; but reluctance to speed Irene's departure by a single day triumphed over his distaste.

"I do not think Aunt Emma will object to his coming," he said.

"I could meet him in New York," continued Irene, "if he would tell me by what steamer to expect him, but he will not. It will be his way not to decide until the last moment which one to take."

"Leo!" It was Miss Trowbridge's voice which disturbed the interview. "Come, please, and hang this hammock. I want Mrs. Courtney to be more comfortable."

Leo rose obediently, and Mrs. Courtney looked closely at Irene.

"Miss Flanders is spending the summer with you?" she asked of her hostess.

"Yes," returned the latter, a very uncharitable sentiment toward Irene swelling her breast. "She is the daughter of an old friend, and was cast upon her own resources for this summer, so I sent for her to come to me." The speaker had really forgotten that it was not wholly in a spirit of charity toward her young guest that the invitation had been sent.

"She is a fine creature. I like those women with noble physiques. It never seems possible that there should be a small spirit concealed in one of them."

"Irene is a good, pleasant sort of person," replied Miss Trowbridge coldly. At the same time she caught the girl's eye and gave her a significant nod, which meant that she might proceed, with the assistance of the maid whom they had brought, to spread the complete and dainty feast.

"I only wish Bertha had so bright an expression of face," returned Mrs. Courtney, admiring the look which Irene cast toward her hostess as she obeyed her signal.

"I am sure our dear Miss Bertha could not be improved," said Miss Trowbridge quickly. "There, the hammock is ready. Let me help you in, Mrs. Courtney. — Leo," drawing near, "see if Miss Alden will not let you place one of those cushions at her back."

Leo obeyed; then, after looking undecidedly after Irene, who was moving about busily in the distance, he seated himself beside the fair Bertha, who accepted his society as the best the occasion offered, and therefore as her inalienable right.

Irene, with kind tact, pressed Phineas into her service, for Susan and Layton had sauntered toward

the mill, and in a short time the lunch was ready to be served.

"I will go and recall the wanderers," said Phineas.

"Let me go," offered Irene instinctively.

Thorne looked at her with his kind, patient smile.

"No; I will go," he said quietly.

Irene flushed rosy red.

"You think I may intrude an incongruous element upon them with my prosaic self?" he continued.

"Oh, Mr. Thorne, I wish for your own sake," began Irene impulsively, and then checked herself.

Phineas came nearer to her. "I want to hear the ending of that sentence very much," he said.

"No, no; I could not. I did not mean to speak at all," protested the girl, painfully confused.

Phineas paused and looked at her attentively. Her face surely expressed pity in its agitation, and a dark wave of color swept up to his forehead.

She lifted her eyes to his timidly.

"Your intuitions are too sympathetic, Miss Flanders," he said. "Tell me now, which were you wishing, — that Susan would be kind to me, or that I would not be so demented?"

"I have no right!" ejaculated Irene. "Forgive me."

"I see," said Phineas quickly. "You are sensible

and right. It is hopeless." He held out his hand, and hers trembled as she placed it in his clasp. Then he turned away and walked toward the mill, leaving Irene quivering with pain at her own cruelty.

Thorne entered the ruin so intent on his own thoughts that he started at the apparition which greeted his eyes.

Susan, with head averted, was listening to the impassioned words which fell swiftly and softly from Layton, whose lover-like attitude and expression left no doubt as to the nature of his speech.

Phineas remained transfixed on the threshold, staring straight at Layton, who suddenly stopped and frowned back at him intolerantly. Susan blushed and looked anxiously from one to the other.

Thorne spoke steadily, addressing Philip. "Perhaps it seems to you that I should excuse myself for this intrusion. On the contrary, however, it is you who should ask pardon of Susan and me for speaking to her as you were doing when I came in. I should suppose the instincts of a gentleman would have brought you first to me, or, better still, to neither of us while present circumstances exist."

Layton's angry face grew contemptuous. "You do not make yourself quite intelligible, Mr. Thorne; but perhaps that is too much to expect."

"You are modest, Mr. Layton; but let us hope you underrate your abilities. I think you can understand if you pay attention." Thorne's face was pale, but his eyes and voice were calm. "Miss Farley's parents are absent. They have left her in my charge. The matter lies in a nutshell."

"Please do not say anything more, Mr. Layton," begged Susan, trembling as the two men looked into each other's eyes with that unrelaxing gaze.

"One might suppose that you wanted undisturbed possession of the field," said Layton, not heeding her. "It is an amusing idea."

Thorne winced in spite of his self-control. "Susan," he said gently, turning to her, "won't you join the others?"

"No, no!" cried the girl, gliding to his side; "not unless you will come with me. You both frighten me so!" she added piteously.

"There is nothing to frighten you," returned Phineas, not looking at her. "Mr. Layton, I may have said my say very awkwardly, but I hope you agree with its substance, — that it would be better to wait until Miss Farley's mother returns before you ask her any serious questions."

"I scarcely need your admonishing," returned Layton haughtily, "and I will have no more of it. Miss

Farley and I are amply able to conduct our own affairs, and your assumption of guardianship is absurd. Miss Farley, —"

The latter interrupted with recovered spirit. "If Miss Farley is not altogether a cipher, I wish you would pay some heed to what she says. First of all, none of Mr. Thorne's assumptions could be absurd. He is right in this matter, and I am dreadfully ashamed to be such a worry to him," here her voice became lower and broke; "and when mamma comes home, I shall tell her how patient and kind he has been, and —"

"That is all right, Susan," interrupted Thorne briefly. "I have said all I can say in this matter. I rely now on your honor; and by the way, my errand here was to tell you both that lunch is ready." Here he turned on his heel and left the mill

Susan gazed at Layton with flashing eyes. "You did not treat him well," she said breathlessly.

"What claim has he, the insolent intruder?" retorted Layton angrily.

"The claim of being a fine and true gentleman," said Susan gallantly.

"So you reciprocate, do you?" asked Philip, exasperated.

"What do you mean?"

"That the country lawyer, the big frog in the little puddle, is graciously in love with his ward. Do you suppose I cannot see through his shallow pretence? Pshaw! You are too truly a daughter of Eve not to know his sentiments well enough."

Susan's face turned crimson and then pale. "You are coarse!" she said. "You are not only insulting, you are tiresome." She was turning away when Philip sprang to her side.

"Don't leave me like this," he begged. "Make allowances for the irritation a man must experience in being interrupted at such a moment. Forgive my egotism if it seems such, but I believe you were going to give me hope. Give me a word now, only a look, and I will wait for your mother with what patience I can, and say no more until she comes."

His quick breathing and excited speech stirred no response in the girl's face. She could not free the hand he held, but she returned his look coldly.

"I cannot tell what I might have said had Mr. Thorne not come in; but I am very glad he came and that I obtained a glimpse of your temper. I have seen a great deal of married life. I know better than most girls do how terribly at her husband's mercy a woman is. Her daily happiness, if she cares for him, is made or marred by his treatment of her, and the

words he addresses to her. You are very gifted, very interesting. I have been flattered by your regard, especially since you have convinced me that you — that you were not merely flirting, but — I cannot marry you, Mr. Layton."

He dropped her hand as she looked into his amazed and frowning face. "This is all absurd, an absurd mistake," he said excitedly. "Am I to come so near winning you and then fail for such a cause! Why, I can explain — "

"Volumes of explanation would do no good. You will save us both pain if you will let the matter drop here. Come, our absence will surely be remarked," said Susan hurriedly, stepping out into the sunshine.

Philip strode along beside her. "You are heartless!" he exclaimed. "You do not suffer, and you care nothing for my suffering."

"I do. Oh, I do!" she returned remorsefully. "I seem to be confused and not to know yet how much of all this is my fault; but I am deeply sorry to cause you pain. It is a trite poor thing to say; but I am sorry."

At the same moment a gladness sprang up in her heart, a relief as of danger escaped, a new exultation in the glorious freedom of her girlhood, with a shudder at the picture of the suave and persistent suitor

transformed into the ill-tempered, or indifferent husband.

The company were seated at table as the two joined them. Layton's face had become impassive, Susan's was excited and high colored. There was a vacant seat between Miss Trowbridge and Irene, and into this she slipped with an admiring remark on the appetizing appearance of the table.

Phineas Thorne sat directly opposite her, and she found she lacked the courage to look at him. It seemed to her he must know of the sneering, belittling remarks Layton had been making about him.

Among the surging thoughts that ebbed and flowed through her mind was Layton's roughly couched suggestion, seeming strangely sweet each time it forced its way to her remembrance.

"How vain I am!" she thought, scornful of her readiness to be credulous of admiration; and she repelled the absurd and sweet suggestion with a sincere humility.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GREEN GOWN.

THAT evening Susan and Phineas were driven home in state from The Eyrie in the Trowbridge carriage. Polly met them at the door, all eagerness to hear an account of the day's doings, and her face fell when Susan pleaded a headache and retired immediately to her room.

"She is such a good hand to describe anything," said Polly regretfully to her brother. "I know of old that you leave all the most interesting things out of your descriptions."

"Susan has had a good deal of excitement to-day," said Phineas. "I have finally had occasion to tell Mr. Layton that he had better wait a little."

"Before Susan!" gasped Polly.

"Yes."

"Oh, Phineas! Then there are three of you who have not enjoyed the day."

Thorne looked at his sister absently. "I am not

sure," he said, as if to himself, "but I think Susan is not angry with me. She has been rather silent on the way home, but her headache would explain that."

The next morning, when Polly and Susan were alone, the former asked a few tentative questions concerning the picnic, and Susan roused herself from her preoccupation and proceeded to give a graphic description of Miss Alden and her cousin, and Miss Trowbridge's devotion to them both.

"So Miss Trowbridge has an ideal after all, you see, Miss Polly," added the girl with a knowing nod. "Now it remains to be seen whether her nephew will share her opinion."

"You don't think that's what she's after, do you?"

"Yes, indeed, I do," returned Susan.

"Well, I'd like to see Miss Alden," observed Polly. "I'd like to see a girl that Emma Trowbridge thinks is good enough for Leo."

"You will if you go to the party."

"Oh, I shall go to the party," returned Miss Polly. "I've been to Leo's parties ever since the first one, when there was one candle on the birthday cake and a rattle for each guest."

"Did you get one?" asked Susan, laughing.

"No, I was a spectator," replied Polly good-naturedly, "just as I shall be to-morrow night."

"You must have been a pretty girl," said Susan, looking at her musingly.

"Oh, not much to boast of," returned the other with a deprecatory toss of the head. "I had a remarkably good complexion, and my hair was a brighter brown than it is now, and, if I do say it, my figure was just plump enough to be pretty; still I wasn't any great things;" and Miss Thorne repressed a smile of satisfaction at the reminiscence of the heyday of her youth, a youth embellished with plenty of flattery.

"You must have been lovely," said Susan kindly. "Such a pretty girl ought to have married. Deacon Elder thinks so too. I can read it in his eye every Sunday."

Polly shook her head. "I had to take care of Phineas," she replied. The following evening found Susan strangely indifferent to the charms of the long-anticipated party. The green dress had come and lay ready on the bed. Susan remembered, as she looked at it, that the attractive idea of dazzling Philip Layton had played the principal part in her motive in sending for it. She thought over their acquaintance. She recalled the many hours they had idled through together. There was little satisfaction in the

retrospect, and there were several episodes the recollection of which made her uncomfortably warm.

"I do not believe I am heartless," she thought, as his last words recurred to her. "Perhaps I ought to feel more unhappy for him than I do, since I believe he is in earnest now; but our friendship has not been a success, and I can only feel happy to have come out of it as safely as I have done. — Bijou Farley, come off that bed!" this to the spaniel, who had leaped to his usual couch, to the threatened detriment of the airy gauze. "Poor Bijou, you do get neglected these days!" she added with an apologetic pat on the dog's head, which elicited demonstrations of joy. "Sit down in that chair and see me dress; for I must go, I suppose. By the way," with sudden interest, "I forgot Miss Alden. It is my duty to go and outshine Miss Trowbridge's ideal!"

An hour later Susan came down into the parlor where Phineas and Polly waited for her.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" exclaimed Polly, clasping her hands. A light came glowing into Phineas' gray eyes as he gazed silently.

Susan did not look at him, but laughed with a touch of embarrassment at Polly's rapture, and floated up and down the room before their admiring eyes with a

little air of bravado which was the best imitation she could command of her natural nonchalance.

"You sylph!" cried Polly. "You mermaid!—Which is she, Phineas? There won't be a person there that can compare with you! But the idea of calling that color green! It just makes you *think* of green, that's all."

"You ought to wear roses," said Phineas.

"I did not remember it in time," replied Susan.

"You would like them, then?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Well, there is a box full there for you and Polly."

"How kind!" exclaimed both women, hastening to the box, from which, when it was opened, Susan took a dark-red bud.

"You will wear it?" she asked Thorne.

"If you say so," he returned.

So Susan pinned the blossom in his coat, and he felt that the evening had given him all he could hope from it.

The Eyrie presented a pretty scene of gayety when the Thorne party arrived there. The night was perfect. The breeze was not so strong as to extinguish the fanciful lights among the trees. The tennis-ground had been floored over for dancing, and was well-lighted. An orchestra sat at one end in an ele-

vated bower of green, while between its rhythmical numbers an invisible string quartette in the house played a soft accompaniment to the talk and laughter of the guests, many of whom had already arrived.

"Where is Irene?" asked Susan as she shook hands with Miss Trowbridge.

"Really that is a difficult question to-night," replied the hostess gayly.

"Is everybody wishing you many happy returns, Mr. Graham?" asked Susan as she passed to him.

"Yes, I cannot avoid that; but I did succeed in warding off the twenty-five candles that Aunt Emma would have burned on a cake in my honor. It is the first time we have done without the candles, and so I really believe that I am a big boy now."

Susan laughed and passed on, on Phineas' arm. "I never saw Mr. Graham so gloomy," she remarked.

"Aren't Emma's diamonds handsome?" asked Polly with some pride.

"Very. She looks as gay to-night as her nephew does the reverse."

Phineas led his charges to a quiet corner of the room. "I am sorry I do not dance, Susan," he said. "I will leave you here with Polly, and bring some young men to you."

"No, I do not care about dancing," replied Susan promptly.

Phineas smiled. "It is a little late to expect us to believe that," he returned.

"It is so warm to-night," she explained.

"Not out on the dancing floor. It will be so inviting there, I only wish I knew how to join in the whirl."

"I wish you did," said Susan.

"Would you dance with an old fellow like me?"

"Yes," she said simply. His eyes sought hers with such undue earnestness that she blushed rosily, for the look recalled again Philip Layton's impertinent remarks.

To Susan's credit be it said that she disbelieved the charge that Phineas was in love with her. She had been accustomed to her own powers of attraction from the time she entered her teens, and she knew that more impossible things had happened than that this staid, quiet man should love a girl fifteen years his junior; but never had he betrayed to her a sign of feeling warmer than friendship. It filled her with shame that Layton's baseless jealousy should actually have given her so many quickened heart-beats since its expression.

"What does it mean?" she asked herself scornfully. "Only that I am eager for a possible novelty

in the incense that my vanity is always craving. I hate myself!"

Some such self-contemptuous thoughts flitted now through her brain, and because she was conscious of blushing, her color deepened, until to Phineas she seemed like a rose in its pale-green calyx.

The rosiness puzzled him until, half turning, he saw Layton approaching. He bowed to the new-comer without embarrassment.

"Mr. Layton will know more dancing men than I, probably," he said, as he shook the hand which the new-comer offered him with an evident desire to re-establish friendly relations.

Susan looked from one to the other. The two men were of about the same height. Layton looked slight and graceful beside Thorne. The former's face was slender, the other's square, with a determined mouth and deep-set eyes. The one face was languidly observant, the other that of a man to whom every moment was full and earnest. One was a handsome, talented artist whom the many admired and praised, the other an obscure lawyer, a sort of general-utility man in real life, unheard of outside the little town where his face was loved or feared; but Susan felt a glow of self-respect as she realized how honestly she admired Thorne above Layton.

The latter spoke, after fluttering Polly with a low bow. Polly had a decided admiration for the young man's poetic face, and felt a secret compassion for him in his character of martyr to her brother's lofty notions.

"If Miss Farley will give me her first dance," he said, "I shall be pleased to find her other partners."

Susan hesitated, then took the offered arm. "I imagine a very little dancing will go a long way to-night," she said, then turned to Polly. "Are you coming out of doors?"

"Yes, indeed. I love to watch dancing; but we will speak to a few friends first."

The girl caught Phineas' eye, and he smiled approval of her as she moved away.

"Your landlord is very swell in his dress suit," remarked Layton jocosely as they turned their faces toward the door.

"Did I ever speak of him to you as my landlord?" she asked coldly.

"Certainly. Does it offend now?"

"Decidedly. What an unmannerly, ungrateful little wretch I have been!" This comment was made mentally. "It seems strange to me," she continued aloud, "that there ever was a time when I did not

appreciate the hospitable kindness that Miss Thorne and her brother have shown me."

"Well, let us not quarrel about them," said Layton, changing his tone to the caressing one she knew. "Why did you hesitate to give me this dance? Was it not your own suggestion that we should remain good friends?"

"Yes, but I think the fewer *téte-à-têtes* we have for the present the better."

"And I think the more we have the better," replied Layton promptly. "A mere difference of opinion. Have you forgotten that you were to test my dancing abilities to-night, and decide if I might come to Chicago next winter?"

"I would not come to Chicago if I were you. Ah! what an ideal place for a summer dance!" this as they reached the floor, and a waltz, dreamy as the soft evening air, sounded from the leafy bower.

Without another word they glided in among the dancers. Yes, if it were possible for Philip Layton to dance into Miss Farley's affections, he would accomplish the undertaking; for in all her varied experience Susan had never had a more skilful and sympathetic partner.

They did not pause until the music died away.

"Can I come to Chicago?" asked Philip, then.

"You dance perfectly. You would have a warm welcome among the young ladies of the —— Club."

They were walking over the velvety turf now, and a silence fell, ominous to Susan, who feared what might be coming. Philip closed his hand over the one that lay on his arm.

"Susan, I have thought a great deal about our talk the other day," he said. "The whole experience seems to me like a bad dream. I cannot leave things so. My whole life will be wretched without you. I am not a bad-hearted fellow. Give me time and I will prove that you are mistaken in thinking so. Of course I know you do not care for me deeply, or you would not lay so much stress on a burst of impatience at such a moment; but give me a little hope and I will win your whole heart as you have won mine. I ask only for a look of encouragement, and the rest shall come later with your mother's sanction. Do not answer me, Susan, unless you can say something kind."

The desperation in his tone as he finished touched his companion. Her eyes grew moist.

"Oh, I wonder if such a foolish, wicked girl was ever born!" she exclaimed.

"None sweeter, none more bewitching ever lived," he returned with conviction; "and if you will be

foolish enough to marry me, I shall be raised to a pinnacle of bliss forever."

Susan lowered her handkerchief and looked at him woefully. "The worst of it is, you believe what you say," she returned; then, as he only gazed at her, too full of his desires to utter them, she went on: "I always knew in my inmost heart you were not a man to marry," she said gently, and with such sincere trouble in her voice that it was not a wounding speech. "May I be explicit with you? You have a man's dislike of everything uncomfortable, and, added to that, an artist's dislike of everything incongruous, unpicturesque, unlovely in any way. You say it would make you happy to marry me, and so perhaps it would if I could always be well, and prettily dressed, and ready to say amusing things; but that isn't the way in married life. Women are ill a great deal, and sometimes they can't be bright and they don't look a bit pretty, and at such times husbands, most of them, think of some means of entertainment for themselves, and go out and seek it. It makes me angry!" exclaimed Susan, forgetting for the moment, in her fervor, the personal bearing of her words. "I have seen so much of it among my married friends, I made up my mind long ago that I would talk and dance with society men, and enjoy myself as a girl

may, but that I would never marry at all unless I should find some one whom I thought would be willing to devote himself to an invalid wife, being cheerful when she was dull, devoted when she looked haggard and plain, and always patient with her inabilities, whatever they might be."

She ceased, but for a minute Layton did not speak.

"Forgive me if I read your thoughts this moment," she added gently. "I have shocked your sensibilities. You think these commonplace suggestions come ill from me, and do not suit the time and place. They grate upon you. Alas, Mr. Layton, life is not all music and soft breezes, with a charming half-light hiding all imperfections, and it is long. I am prudent enough to prepare for its adverse side."

"You are, indeed, a prudent maiden, — at times," returned Layton dryly.

"Do not taunt me with my foolishness," begged the girl. "You must believe that I never dreamed of your being in earnest. You were not for a long time, and I humbly ask your forgiveness for whatever I have said or done that was misleading."

Layton looked gloomily at the drooping, light figure. Her neck gleamed white in the moonlight, and her hands hung crossed before her.

"So you have decided in advance that I am not the

matrimonial Mark Tapley you are looking for?" he said bitterly.

"Do you think by any possibility you might be?" she returned humbly.

"Not if you do not love me. If you did, all your bugbears would disappear."

"Yes; that is the trouble with girls. They fall in love and then they will not see bugbears."

"That is the case with those who have hearts. Either you have none, as I said, or else you love another. Tell me if you do, and end all hope at once."

Oh, the swift crimson that flushed face, and throat, and neck! Susan summoned all her courage.

"Is it not a little odd, Mr. Layton, that the only alternative to my loving you, or some other man, must be that I have no heart? However, let it be so; and now shall we go back to the house?"

In silence Layton offered his arm and they walked on. Just before they ascended to the piazza he stopped.

"I want to ask you, before we go in, to forgive my persistence, and also to promise me that if you should ever change your mind you will send for me without hesitation."

"I promise," said Susan.

The mandolins within were playing an Italian sere-

nade. How Susan ever afterward abhorred that persuasive melody!

"I shall leave Proctor to-morrow," said Layton, "and this is our good-by. What would it be to me to know that you felt it as I do!"

She gave him her hand. "Good-by," she said, and her throat felt dry.

He pressed the hand in both his own. "Good-by, Susan — *darling!*"

In another minute they were in the lighted parlors, looking into one another's pale faces.

"Here is a chair for you," said Layton. He seated her, then bowed and quickly disappeared.

Poor Susan certainly had a heart, for it was throbbing painfully. An undue sense of shame and guilt oppressed her.

She looked up, and a man at the other side of the room turned and caught her eye, and immediately started toward her.

It was Phineas Thorne. How like a tower of strength he looked to Susan! How infinitely soothing to her was the expression of his eyes!

"You alone here, Susan?" he said.

"Never alone while you are my friend," she thought. What she said was, "I do not mind it. Have you seen Irene yet?"

CHAPTER XVII.

POLLY MEETS A PARAGON.

POLLY THORNE looked in vain for a beauty answering to the description of Miss Alden, and at last her curiosity impelled her to seek Miss Trowbridge and make known her desire.

"Certainly you shall see Miss Alden," returned the hostess graciously. "Leo, dear, I do not think there is any necessity for you to remain here longer. Take Miss Thorne and find Miss Alden."

"I always did like to see pretty girls," said Polly rather apologetically, as Graham offered her his arm, "and Susan has given me such a glowing description of your friend that I did not feel as though I could let the evening go by without seeing her."

"She is well worth seeing," agreed Leo, "and I owe you thanks for coming and emancipating me."

He had not yet his usual gay, careless manner, and as they walked on he glanced eagerly from side to

side in his search. "Aunt Emma is an ardent admirer of Miss Alden," he added.

"Yes, and she doesn't fancy young girls as a rule," returned Polly. "That is what makes me so anxious to see this paragon."

"You have the correct word, Miss Thorne. Miss Alden is a paragon."

"Come, come, Leo! You don't mean to say you don't admire paragons?" returned Miss Polly mischievously. His ill-humor amused her.

"I have not such poor taste as not to admire Miss Alden. I think we shall find her in the house or on the piazzas. She does not care for dancing."

"Well, that seems strange."

"There is not much dancing done in the circle in which she moves. There she is yonder, at the back of the piazza, in white, — *and there is* —"

Polly did not notice the eager addition. She was too absorbed in distinguishing Miss Alden, an easy undertaking, for there were few young people who had not by this time sought the dancing-floor.

Leo led Miss Thorne to where sat the beautiful girl, and introduced her.

"How does this unique experience come about?" he asked. "This is the first time that Miss Alden was ever discovered alone at a social gathering."

"It is only for a minute," she answered sweetly. "Mr. Randolph has gone to get me an ice. It was quite a pleasant surprise to discover several acquaintances here to-night. I had no idea Miss Trowbridge sent her invitations for your *fête* so far as Boston."

"Yes, we have some Bostonians; but Miss Thorne is a Proctor lady and one of my earliest friends and allies. I would like to have you know one another." With this Leo left the two ladies and moved away a short distance to where Irene stood alone.

She laughed softly as he approached. "Are you any better tempered than when I last saw you?" she asked.

"Are you all right, Irene?" he returned hurriedly. "Are you having a good time? Whom have you met?"

She laughed again at his anxious tone. "I am having a charming time. The music is enchanting! I have been talking a little to Miss Alden, and watching people. Your business to-night is with your guests, and not to be thinking about me. You know my faculty for enjoying myself."

"Aunt Emma was outrageous. I have not forgiven her, if you have. The only natural and proper thing was for you to receive the guests with us, and in that way to meet people."

"Surely she had a right to make any arrangement that suited her," said Irene pacifically. "She thought it would be pleasanter for Miss Alden if I were free to see that she was being constantly entertained."

"So that is why you are out here, is it?" asked Graham angrily. "Have you danced at all?"

"No; but you are being absurd," she returned coaxingly. "There is nothing for you to be excited about. It is a compliment to me that your aunt treats me without formality."

"She treats you without consideration," returned Graham. "Never mind any talk of duty to-night, Irene. It would be thrown away on me. Shall we go and have a dance?"

Irene longed to ask him if he had invited Miss Alden, but she did not dare. She took his arm, and together they approached Bertha's chair. Mr. Randolph had returned with the ice, and Miss Thorne was beginning to look for some graceful way of escape.

"Miss Flanders and I are going to the dancing-floor," announced Leo.

"Indeed?" asked a voice at his elbow. It was Miss Trowbridge, who had come to satisfy herself that all was going as it should with the bright particular star of her evening.

Irene's heart leaped as though she had been discovered in appropriating some treasure belonging to her hostess.

"I hope Miss Alden and Mr. Randolph will enjoy following you after a time," continued Miss Trowbridge. "The floor is very good, I believe."

"But, Miss Trowbridge, I so seldom dance," returned Bertha languidly.

Miss Trowbridge gave a short laugh. "I am rather surprised at Leo's attempting it, I confess," she said. "I have heard him make the most sweeping denunciations against dancing when the thermometer stands above seventy."

"Well, I am renewing my youth to-night, you see," he returned calmly. "Miss Alden, I will return later to see if you have changed your mind."

"Ah?" she returned archly. "I do not remember that you have asked me to dance at all."

Leo made her an exaggerated bow. "May I have the pleasure, Miss Alden?"

"I will dance once with you," she returned graciously.

"Perhaps you will go now, Miss Bertha?" suggested Miss Trowbridge.

"I am engaged to Miss Flanders for the next," said Leo shortly.

"And I am beginning to feel very ill-treated," remarked Mr. Randolph.

"I believe I did say to you that I would not dance this evening. Well, I will dance once with you also," said Miss Alden consolingly.

Irene and Leo moved away. Miss Alden looked up at Miss Trowbridge smilingly. "I foresee that congratulations will soon be in order," she said.

"I do not understand you, my dear Miss Bertha."

"Mr. Graham and Miss Flanders. I suppose the match will please you?"

Miss Trowbridge gave a rather unmirthful laugh. "Ah, your bright eyes are at fault this time, my dear. Leo would as soon think of falling in love with Mr. Randolph. No, there is no sentiment there, — only good-comradeship;" and the speaker turned away, simply because she was too deeply stirred and vexed to speak further.

Polly Thorne accompanied her back to the house. "You heard that, Polly," she exclaimed. "The time has come. Bertha must have seen something. Irene has fallen in love with him. She must go. This is the thanks I get for befriending her in her loneliness. It is an outrage! If only I am not too late."

"Hush, hush, Emma! That isn't the way to talk.

How do you know but that Leo is the one that's in love?"

This was oil to the flame. Miss Trowbridge turned fiercely upon her friend. "Do you think I do not know my boy? Do you think that could be and I be unaware of it? Don't be ridiculous, Polly."

"I think she is a lovely girl myself, and Phineas just grows enthusiastic over her," returned Miss Thorne stoutly.

Miss Trowbridge uttered a groan. "I wish he would marry her and take her away," she retorted.

Then Polly's cheeks grew pink. "Phineas isn't the marrying sort," she said; "not but that I wish he would marry."

"Isn't Miss Alden an exquisite creature!" exclaimed Emma wistfully. "If it were not for Leo's absurd quixotism toward Irene, he would be entertaining Bertha this minute. It is exasperating beyond anything I ever had to bear. I cannot make you understand, Polly, what Miss Alden's position is; how desirable she is in every way; how wholly it is her due that Leo should devote himself to her, since fate has sent her to our very door."

"Well, young men don't see with our eyes, and you can't make them," returned Polly. "It does seem to me, Emma, that you ought to have a pretty

soft spot in your heart for Richard Flanders' daughter. We know what he is, and this has probably been the happiest time the poor girl ever had."

"She has come to be the torment of my life," returned Miss Trowbridge shortly. "I have had the patience of Job as I look back upon it. To-night the straw has been added that breaks the camel's back."

"Well, I am going down to watch the dancing," said Miss Thorne, gathering up the skirt of her black silk dress preparatory to crossing the grass. "I suppose you must stay here."

"Yes. If Leo seems to be forgetting his engagement with Miss Alden, remind him."

"Indeed I shall not!" muttered Miss Polly as she descended the steps. "A likely thing! That handsome young creature, Irene! I feel almost like warning her of breakers ahead. Emma Trowbridge has taken the bit in her teeth, and she never knows how to stop herself if she gets going."

As was natural, when Miss Thorne reached the floor her first search was for the recreant couple. She discovered them easily, for among the swaying, whirling couples, there were few so tall.

"My! how they do go!" she murmured admiringly. "For all the world like one pair of feet. Well, poor Irene, have a good time while you can!" They

passed near where Polly sat. There was a half smile on Irene's lips, and her face looked very fair against her black hair and above the airy black tissue of her dress. Miss Polly sighed as they floated by, and felt very romantic. She had not fancied Miss Alden's manner, and her sympathies were all with Irene. The music ceased, and to her surprise Leo brought his companion to the vacant seat beside her.

"I am going to leave Miss Flanders with you, Miss Polly, until after my dance with Miss Alden."

"And through a good many dances, Leo," added Irene quietly. "You know that as host you ought to dance with many here. I enjoy it, and perhaps you will introduce some partners to me, only be sure to choose tall ones."

"Well, I like that. I understood you to say just now that you were satisfied with your humble servant's step."

"Of course I said so, and I hope we shall have one more waltz, but I must not appropriate too much of you."

"Doesn't she sugar them nicely, Miss Polly?" asked Graham. "I give you my word, she is always at it. I can't tell how I managed to keep up an appearance of respectable behavior before she took me in hand."

"You are too bad!" said Irene. "I shall not make you another suggestion."

"Well, will you dance with me the next time but one?"

"Certainly not."

So he left, and Miss Polly laughed. "You understand how to manage him," she said.

She and Irene talked together for some time, and Miss Polly contrasted the gentle, warm-hearted cordiality with which Irene merged her own interest in whatever interested her companion, with Miss Alden's elegant passivity, greatly to the latter's disadvantage.

Soon after the music began again, the young lady appeared leaning on Leo's arm.

"How beautiful and fresh she looks in that white dress!" said Irene heartily.

"And she actually seems to have a little animation just now," added Miss Thorne.

"I admire repose," observed Irene.

"Yes, but sometimes it's a little hard to decide where repose ends and stupidity begins. Now they've begun," added Miss Polly with interest. "Well, I should like to know who calls that dancing. Why, they're just walking around."

"Some people like that quiet sort of waltzing," returned Irene, smiling.

"Well, if I ever saw anything so dead-and-alive! It makes one want to throw a pack of lighted fire-crackers under them. I shall look at the others. What is puzzling me, is where Susan can be. The child is just distracted about dancing, and I made sure she would be on the floor constantly."

"I saw her not long ago, going into the house with Mr. Layton," returned Irene.

"Oh, you did? All right then. Under some circumstances, I suppose a little talk in some quiet corner is more interesting than a dance."

Irene looked at the speaker, whose significant tone was too tempting for her. "Are they engaged, Miss Thorne?" she exclaimed.

"No, oh, no!" returned Polly with much propriety of manner. "Phineas and I cannot allow that in Mrs. Cox's absence — that is, if we can help it," she added with a laugh.

Irene saw how unconscious the speaker was of her brother's sentiments toward Susan. It saddened her to think of him and then to picture the young girl and her lover enjoying a *tête-à-tête* in some quiet niche; and while she was mourning the trials that seem sure to fall to the lot of the noblest souls, sud-

denly the particular noble soul who occupied her thoughts appeared within a stone's throw of her, and by his side the very young woman who she knew was his heart's desire.

"There is Susan now, with your brother," she said.

Miss Polly beckoned to her energetically. "Susan, I want to see you dance!" she exclaimed in an injured tone.

"You should have been here a little while ago. I was dancing. —Why, is that you, Irene?" and the two girls kissed one another affectionately.

"Well, dance some more," urged Polly. "Phineas, you are no sort of an escort. Find some good partners for Susan."

"She does not care to dance any more to-night," replied Thorne quietly. "It is odd, but such is the contrariness of human nature. — Sit there by Irene, Susan."

Irene was not to sit long, however. Leo soon began to bring her the required partners, who were also presented to Susan. Leo himself asked the latter for her next dance, only to be told she was not dancing.

It cannot truthfully be said that she gave the reply without regret. She still tasted the bitte-

flavor of her painful experience, but the music set her little feet in motion, and she desisted from the dance only out of respect to Layton, — as people have been known to wear crape perfunctorily. She was glad when the time came to go home.

Phineas had been revolving in his mind all the evening the perplexity caused him by Layton's disappearance from the festive scene, and Susan's extraordinarily quiet demeanor. He thought he had solved the problem at last, and when he was parting with Susan for the night in the little entry-way at home, he held her hand while he said, —

"When I appealed to your honor the other day, I little thought it would be the means of spoiling the party you have looked forward to with so much pleasure. I am very sorry, Susan."

She looked at his brown hand in which hers, with its creamy glove, was lost.

"You are mistaken," she replied quietly. "I might as well tell you, for Mr. Layton will leave Proctor to-morrow, and you would learn it, that we have concluded that it is not profitable for us to see so much of one another hereafter."

"You mean until your mother comes?"

"No, — ever," returned the girl almost inaudibly.

Thorne's grasp tightened involuntarily on her hand.

For one moment he was as wildly elated by the implied information as though it meant success for himself.

"Poor fellow!" he said fervently.

"Oh, don't say that!" begged Susan piteously. She raised her tearful eyes to Thorne's, which were strangely luminous. "You do not understand," she said. "We should have been very unhappy together. Do say you trust me."

"I trust you, Susan." He reluctantly relinquished her hand as he said it.

"You are always so good to me!" she said gratefully.

He watched her as she went up the stairs. She had once declared that green gown to be a dream. Phineas found her words true that night after sleep had visited his pillow. He had tried, too, to get his mind off the fascinating subject.

When Polly came bustling into the hall after seeing that the dining-room windows were fast, he had sent her up stairs, saying that he would read awhile before retiring.

"Phineas Thorne, it is half-past twelve!" she had protested.

"Yes, but I am not sleepy," had been his reply; after which he had lighted a lamp and taken a solid

and sensible book from the shelves, which he perused, or appeared to peruse, for a long time, — he did not know whether for minutes or for hours; but at any rate until he was strangely interrupted.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DOWN FROM THE EYRIE.

MISS TROWBRIDGE'S wrath had been well nursed through the evening, and the culmination of her sense of injury was reached when Miss Alden came to her to say good-night.

"I would have been glad to thank Mr. Graham also for this pleasant evening," she said, "but I thought it better not to disturb the very pretty *tête-à-tête* going on in the hall as I passed. Be sure I am not mistaken, Miss Trowbridge. We shall soon be called upon to congratulate you. Mrs. Courtney has fallen in love with Miss Flanders, and she will quite envy you."

After this, although Emma Trowbridge realized that it was a disagreeable duty which must be performed before she slept, she dreamed of no hesitation. Irene's gayety in the little talk that followed the departure of the last guests, only tended to increase her apprehension and resentment, and by the time

the house was still and she had slipped into her wrapper, it was rather a relief than otherwise to seek Irene's room with intent to crush her in her presumptuous happiness.

She found the girl brushing her long black hair. It seemed in its fine light texture like a cloud about the radiant face as Irene took a step toward her guest.

"How good of you to come! I am not at all sleepy, either," she said. "Take this chair and let us gossip a little."

"Thanks; I would better not sit down," returned Miss Trowbridge. "I shall stay only a minute. I came to say a few words to you — disagreeable, perhaps, but evidently necessary, and which will be for the advantage of us all in the end."

There was no mistaking the disapproval in the speaker's face. A pang of surprise and pain contracted the girl's heart, and she looked straight into Miss Trowbridge's eyes and waited.

"I have been foolish and weak myself to let things drift so; but the result I feared has come, and it is my duty to protect my nephew."

"Please be frank, Miss Trowbridge," said Irene. "I do not even suspect what you can mean."

"I mean that you have fallen in love with Leo."

The speech seemed to stun the girl like a blunt weapon. She became frightfully pale, and absolutely motionless.

Her stony face cooled Miss Trowbridge's anger. The latter went on in haste to have finished.

"I have enjoyed you very much this summer, and I think the change has done you good; but perhaps it would be better in every way if you were to go now. I should like Leo to have all his time to entertain Miss Alden, to whose hospitality he owes much."

Still the solemn gaze of the dark eyes, and the solemn curve of the still lips.

"Well?" ventured Miss Trowbridge, after a moment of waiting.

There was no answer.

After another long second of silence, Irene moved to the door and opened it. Miss Trowbridge walked out and the door closed softly behind her.

She paused and listened. No lock was turned, but it would have required courage superior to Emma Trowbridge's to reopen that door.

She moved away to her room a little tremulously. Irene had always been so soft, so loving, so pliable to her wishes, so grateful and humble; who would

have supposed that she would resent her hostess' frankness so deeply?

"Nonsense! That is only the calm that precedes the storm," thought Miss Trowbridge with returning spirit. "She will have a cry, and afterwards be able to take a sensible view of the whole affair. I was obliged to let her see that I could not consider a match between her and Leo. She is so sensible. She will not make any fuss."

But there was no storm raging in that closed room. As soon as Irene was alone she sat down and waited patiently to be able to form sensible and connected thoughts.

Only too soon the numbed feeling gave place to the acute pain of a fresh wound, and a period of agony succeeded.

There had been no consciousness hitherto in her relations with Leo; but she knew now that love for him had been growing in her heart like a slow-forming flower.

Miss Trowbridge had forced open the bud, and Irene realized that as such treatment kills the blossom, so her prematurely discovered love must perish in this hour. Her only consolation lay in this conviction.

"Father, father!" she murmured in her anguish;

but well she knew that less than nothing was to be hoped for from the parent whom she instinctively implored. Then, strange it is but true, that, little as she knew Phineas Thorne, in her desperation she found in the heaving sea of her distress an anchorage in the thought of him.

"If I could get to Miss Thorne!" she thought; yet it was Phineas whom she pictured to herself as protecting her, hiding her. Oh to find some cool, dark place, where none would think of looking for her, and to creep into it and be forgotten!

She cast a glance around her luxurious room. She could never sleep in that bed again. She thought of the coming morning; the breakfast table where her place would be set at Miss Trowbridge's right and opposite Leo. A smile actually flitted over her lips at the impossibility of undergoing the ordeal of any further daylight hours beneath this roof.

"I will go now," she suddenly determined. "I will go now to the Thornes'."

The idea relieved her oppression at once. It seemed to her that she could not prepare swiftly enough to be gone from The Eyrie.

She twisted up her floating hair. She put on the black worsted dress in which she had taken so many

tramps with Leo. She packed a bag with small articles, then put on her hat and jacket and took her gloves in her hand.

She went down stairs quietly, and hesitated at the door. She did not like to leave the house unlocked. Passing into the drawing-room, she unfastened and lifted a heavy window, stepped through it upon the piazza, and lowered it again. This was not accomplished noiselessly, but she did not wait to learn whether she had been overheard. An unlocked window might not be less unsafe than an unlocked door; but it was the best she could do.

She hurried through the grounds. The moon was very low. Could it be possible that less than two short hours ago she was one of the gay crowd that laughed and talked under the tinted lights on this very lawn, so dark and still?

The walk was long to the Thornes', and although Irene would not usually have been fatigued by it, to-night she set out in a wearied condition. The care and supervision of preparations for the *fête* had been gladly assumed by her, and she had been on her feet all day. Exhausted as she was in mind as well as in body, the shadows made her start; but at last, unmolested, she came in sight of the Thorne cottage. Her faint heart leaped at sight of a light

in the window. She had meant to wait for sunrise, on the porch behind Miss Polly's morning-glories, but now she sped toward the open, lighted window.

Phineas Thorne, sitting near the lamp frowning upon a page before which floated persistently a gauzy-robed figure, looked up at a slight sound, and saw indistinctly a dark-eyed, white face behind the screen.

"Mr. Thorne, it is I," a voice said softly.

Phineas hurried to the door and opened it.

"Miss Flanders! I can hardly believe it is really you, alone here at this hour!" he exclaimed as she came in.

He drew forward an arm-chair, into which she sank wearily. "Have you walked from The Eyrie?"

"Yes."

"Am I wanted there?"

"No."

"Polly?"

"No."

"Then do not try to talk until you are rested."

He went to a closet and poured out a glass of wine. "This is Polly's currant wine," he said. "I should like to have you drink it."

Irene drank half the contents of the glass, and Phineas reseated himself by the lamp and took up his book.

Polly, coming home in the carriage, had described Miss Trowbridge's vexation at Irene and Leo, and had prognosticated dire things for the former.

Phineas had advised her against such free comment on Miss Trowbridge's confidences; but he felt very thankful for it now. It gave him the clew he needed. He knew Irene well enough to understand that only severe measures would drive her to take this step. While he sat, apparently reading, and really studying how best to help the wounded creature who had sought shelter under his roof, Irene shaded her eyes with her hand and gratefully accepted the proffered silence.

At length her heart beat less wildly, and strength began to return to her limbs. "Mr. Thorne," she said, "will you do me the favor to let me sit here during the few hours before daylight, and go yourself to your room?"

Phineas closed his book. "Certainly, Miss Flanders," he replied. "There is a pillow on the sofa there, if you feel inclined to sleep."

Irene looked at him with grateful eyes. "You are kind not to ask any explanation to-night," she said.

"I do not need any. Are you sure you prefer not to have me sit here with you? You saw how interested I was in this book when you arrived?"

Irene smiled faintly. "I am sure you were not intending to read all night. I greatly prefer you should not stay."

Phineas rose and adjusted the lamp. "There is oil enough in it to last till morning," he said.

"May I — may I put it out, if I like, later?"

"By all means. Shall I leave the window open?"

"If you please."

"Then good-night." He was going with the commonplace farewell, as though it were his custom to leave a young lady alone in his parlor at two or three o'clock in the morning, when she rose and held out her hand.

"How kind you are!" she said in a low voice.

"I owe you kindness," he replied with his peculiar smile.

She pressed his hand gratefully, and he went out. As soon as his step sounded in the room overhead she blew out the lamp, then sank back into her chair with a sensation of respite. She had found the cool dark spot she craved.

That room in which she heard Phineas' step was not his. It was Polly's. The latter never locked her door, on principle, and now she opened her eyes and looked at her brother in a dazed fashion.

"Be quiet, Polly," he said as he bent over her.

"Is it burglars?" she whispered hoarsely.

"There are no burglars. Are you awake, Polly?'

"Of course I'm awake. Is Susan sick? What's the matter?"

"Don't make any noise. Miss Flanders is down stairs."

Polly started and raised herself on one elbow. "Then I guess I'm not awake," she returned with staring eyes.

"Yes, she is there. Probably your suspicion of Emma's intention was correct. At any rate, Miss Flanders is here, and has walked the whole distance alone. She must be very miserable, and I wanted you to have time to get used to the thought so that you may welcome her in the morning without too much surprise. I want you to invite her to stay with us as long as it will be convenient for her. You know what she is. You know she is no hysterical, silly girl, to fly off at a tangent."

"She's a jewel!" exclaimed Polly. "Emma Trowbridge must be in her dotage. But the idea of her sitting down there all alone!"

"Yes; of course she did not wish to have you or Susan wakened, and to endure the consequent questioning. It will be hard enough in the morning. I'm glad you are the kindest woman in the world,

Polly;" and with this Phineas stepped softly out and into his own room.

It goes without saying that Miss Thorne slept very little more that night. Just before dawn she fell into an uneasy slumber filled with dreams of Irene, and at break of day she arose.

As soon as she was dressed she went in her noiseless slippers into a small, unused bedroom at the back of the house. She opened its single window, brought fresh linen and made up the bed, filled the water pitcher, hung clean towels on the rack, and gave numerous touches to the dressing table, which gave the little apartment an inviting look. Then, without hesitating, she went down stairs and into the parlor. Irene was sitting in the same place, her head resting against the high chair-back, watching the rosy sky.

She started at sight of Polly, and arose.

Miss Thorne was shocked at the alteration in the girl's face, but she came forward quietly and put an arm around her and kissed her pale lips.

"I thought I should find you here," she said simply. "I had a vivid dream that you had come." She kept her arm about the girl's shoulders as she spoke, and pressed her cheek against Irene's cold one. "There won't be any need now or any time for

you to tell us a word about what made you do it," she continued. A dry sob went quivering through the girl's frame, and Polly held her closer. "I know Emma Trowbridge right through, and I know she says and does things at times that are simple enough to push a body beyond all endurance. Now that's right, dear. That's right."

For the warm, loving embrace, the homely, caressing tone, had melted Irene's torpor. She clung to Polly, and sobbed and cried uncontrollably. The latter drew her down upon a sofa and smoothed the dark hair, and kissed it, interspersing her caresses with soft ejaculations like "Poor lamb!" and "Darling child!" Irene's hungry heart drank in the spontaneous tenderness, and found it balm to her cruel wound.

"Now you are all tired out, my dear," said Polly when the girl was sufficiently quiet to listen. "I want you to give yourself up and let me take care of you just as if you were a child. Come up stairs with me. I will take your bag."

Irene followed obediently, and Miss Thorne led her into the little back room with its single bed so white and inviting.

"Here is a little corner that we never use. You'll be quieter here than any place I could put you.

Now this is yours, and to be yours until your father comes to get you. Don't contradict me, dear. I promise to make you comfortable. Now I want you to undress and get into bed, and don't lock the door, for I'm going to bring you some chocolate and toast. After to-day, if you want to go in and room with Susan, she'll be overjoyed to have you. Her room is large and pleasant. Now good-by for a little while. Let me see you in that bed when I come back."

Irene caught the speaker's hands and kissed her. "Miss Thorne," she began, brokenly, "I never—"

"Yes dear, I know all about it," interrupted Polly, returning the kiss; then she slipped softly out of the room.

CHAPTER XIX.

ALL THE TRUTH.

THE family at The Eyrie assembled late at breakfast that morning. Philip Layton tried to disguise his haggard appearance by assuming a cheerful manner. Leo came down in the best of spirits, and congratulated his aunt on escaping the headache which frequently assailed her after an unusual effort.

"Thank you, I never felt better," she returned. Her painful duty had been performed. Irene would be sure soon to make her adieu to The Eyrie, and then matters would easily go her own way.

"I shall be taking my leave of you to-day," said Layton, accepting his coffee. "It can hardly be called a sudden leave after this long and enjoyable visit."

Miss Trowbridge and Leo both looked up in surprise.

"Oh, we can't allow that," said the latter cordially. "Wait for the general breaking up, won't you?"

It suited Miss Trowbridge to let the guest depart. Then she and Leo would be entirely free to leave Proctor as soon after Miss Alden's departure as seemed desirable; but her face and tone expressed polite regret.

"You know, Mr. Layton, how glad we shall be to keep you as long as we stay."

"You are both very kind, but I had a letter from my grandfather yesterday, and he wishes me to visit him. He is getting far along in years, and I must not deny any request of his."

"Ah, of course," agreed Miss Trowbridge.

"That alters matters," said Leo, who understood his friend's expectations. "Where can Irene be?" he added. "She is usually an early bird under all circumstances. Perhaps she grew tired waiting, as we were so late, and so went out for a walk."

Miss Trowbridge felt a slight uneasiness. Perhaps Irene's resentment had lasted unexpectedly. Perhaps she had decided not to come to breakfast. It would be annoying if the girl's pride should not prove equal to co-operating with her hostess sufficiently to conceal from the household the fact that there had been any unpleasantness between them, — and then what would Leo say? Yes, that thought was very annoying to Miss Trowbridge.

"I dare say she is very sleepy this morning," she said. "She insisted upon doing a great deal yesterday, and then the late hours. Let her sleep."

Soon after the three arose from table, Layton took his leave. His preparations had been made the night before, and Moses drove him to the station.

"I should think, Leo, you would have gone with Philip," observed Miss Trowbridge, who was keenly disappointed to discover her nephew's determination to remain at home. It was now ten o'clock and Irene had made no sign. The uneasy woman had eagerly waited for Leo to set out with his friend, in order that she might safely investigate the persistent silence. For the first time in his life she was displeased at his proximity, and her reproach had a touch of sharpness.

"I should have gone," he replied, "but that I had promised Irene to ride with her this morning. Layton understood. I explained it to him." Leo's face wore a half smile as he seated himself on the piano stool. His aunt sat near by in a cushioned window-seat. "Lazy girl!" he continued; "perhaps this will bring her." He took his violin and played "The Mill in the Valley." When he had finished the melody, he listened. There was no sign from above stairs.

"Aunt Emma," he exclaimed, laying down the

violin and drawing the stool toward her with a quick movement, "I must tell you what I am going to tell her to-day. *I love her.*" His face, radiant with happiness, was so close to Miss Trowbridge that she could have touched it. All his life he had come to her with his joys, but this morning there was that light in his face which transfigures the plainest features. He took his aunt's hand. "She would say you ought to know first. She is always reminding me that you have first claim on my very thoughts. Dear Aunt Emma, I find the new love does not make me love you less, but more. How happy we shall be! She is so fond of you, so grateful to you! What an angel she is, with heaven shining in her soft eyes; and yet I did not know till last night, think of it," he stopped and laughed in his abundant happiness, "I did not know until last night, — no, until this morning, — that I loved her." He paused.

Miss Trowbridge looked appealingly at him and held his hand fast. "Who — who are you talking of, dear?" she asked brokenly.

"Aunt Emma, you know it is Irene." He lingered fondly on the name.

"Does she know this?"

"I just told you, dear, that she does not. I did not know it myself till about two o'clock this morning.

I will tell you another secret. I have not slept since yesterday."

Miss Trowbridge moistened her lips. "Supposing she does not love you?" she said.

"She likes me, I know," he returned, "and nothing could kill my hope but years of refusals."

"Leo," Miss Trowbridge's tone thrilled him, "can you recall what I suffered at the hands of Irene's father, and then ask me to rejoice when you, upon whose future hang my dearest hopes, tell me you love that man's daughter?" She snatched her hands away and buried her face in them, and rocked back and forth in an abandon of wretchedness. "I thought you loved me too well for this, Leo, yet from the first, — from the first, — I recognized the danger."

He slipped his arm around her. "I never suspected that Irene's father was connected with herself in your mind," he said anxiously. "You will overcome that objection when you stop to consider her own intrinsic worth and what she has been to you all summer. She —"

"A bad inheritance! a bad inheritance!" mourned his aunt despairingly. "Leo, I hoped you would learn to love Bertha Alden. She is my choice of all the world for you. Irene is not fit, is not suitable. I cannot, *cannot* consent." The speaker had for-

gotten her fears in her tenacious, all-absorbing desire. She dropped her hands and looked with longing, reddened eyes into Leo's face, which had changed and now wore a troubled, grave expression.

He said nothing for half a minute, but held the hand she slid into his.

"You want me to be happy in your way, or not at all, then, Aunt Emma?"

She did not answer.

"I owe you a great deal; but as for consenting not to marry the woman I love if she will have me, that passes the bounds of reason. You do not mean, I hope, that you feel it impossible that you may become reconciled to this?"

"How can I tell?" she returned. "It is a dreadful blow to me. Surely you will show me sufficient consideration not to speak to her on the subject for a few days."

Leo arose and paced up and down the room. It was a great deal to ask of him, yet he knew how Irene would bid him answer. A tender, impatient smile touched his mouth. "I will try," he said shortly. He turned quickly. "I do not believe Irene is sleeping," he added, then he threw open the door leading to the dining-room. "Mary," he said

to the maid, "please go up and ask Miss Flanders if she is intending to ride with me this morning."

He resumed his walking and his aunt looked dully out of the window. She felt helpless now. She thought it probable that Irene was packing, and intending to leave by the first convenient train. She had little doubt that the girl would frame a sufficiently plausible reason for departure, not to throw suspicion upon her hostess, and her pride would probably cause her to treat Leo with unusual coolness; but all this gave Miss Trowbridge no jot of comfort now. Leo was in love, and where lived the girl who could resist Leo? She cast a despairing glance around at him. How satisfactory he was to the eye! How strong his frame! How firm his tread! How noble his head and frank, young face!

Mary, the maid, appeared, large-eyed and wonder-stricken in the doorway. "Miss Trowbridge, I can't make Miss Flanders hear. I knocked and knocked, louder and louder, and she doesn't answer."

Miss Trowbridge turned pale. "Leo, wait!" she cried, for he was hurrying to the door. She arose and went up stairs, closely followed by Leo and the frightened maid. Arrived at Irene's door, she knocked. No answer, so she tried the handle. The door yielded easily. She pushed it open about an

inch. "Irene!" she called. No answer. She threw open the door. "Not there!" she exclaimed.

Leo, lingering at the head of the stairs, heard the astonished ejaculation. He strode forward and into the room. His aunt's face was flushed. The black dress Irene had worn the evening before lay on the bed. Her flowers were withering on the dressing-table. "The bed hasn't been slept in!" ejaculated the maid.

"How did you find the front door this morning?" asked Miss Trowbridge sharply.

"Locked and bolted, ma'am. I opened it but a very little time before you came to breakfast, and Miss Flanders couldn't have passed out of it afterward without my seeing her."

Graham looked from one to the other. Irene must have left in the night, yet the door had been found bolted. His old fantastic jest as to her supernatural nature swept through his mind. "How do you explain this?" he asked, bewildered.

"I do not explain it. Mary, you may go down stairs." Miss Trowbridge's knees bent beneath her, and, as the maid went out reluctantly, she was glad to seat herself in the chair Irene had offered her the night before.

Thoughts and surmises flew swiftly through Leo's

mind. "Had you any idea, — had anything happened, — can't you throw any light on this, Aunt Emma?" he asked.

"It throws a new light on Irene," she returned. "She evidently has a taste for being theatrical."

"That is the most obviously unjust criticism you ever made upon anybody," returned Graham impatiently. "Think, think, please, for I must not wait here long. Try to get a clew. If Irene left of her own will, — and of course she did, for you see she changed her ball-dress, — she had some good reason for doing so."

Something in his aunt's moved face gave him a sudden idea. "Did you say anything to her last night after the party, reprove her, criticise her, — say anything to hurt her feelings? Tell me."

Miss Trowbridge was trembling in every limb. "I came in here and had a little talk with her before going to bed. I gave her advice which I had a perfect right to give, little expecting this absurd *dénouement*," she returned quietly, more afraid of her nephew's compelling eyes than she had ever been of anything in her life.

"Queer!" said Leo quickly. "You must have happened to touch some very sensitive spot. Let us see. She knows no one here but the Thornes

and Mrs. Courtney. I will try the Thornes' first. Don't be afraid, Aunt Emma, I'll find her." He advanced close to his aunt. "I know you do not mean it," he added kindly, "but really you have seemed inconsiderate of Irene two or three times lately. She is so sweet and willing, it is easy to impose upon her; but this will open your eyes, won't it? Good-by. I shall bring her back before very long;" and he was gone.

He ran down stairs, caught up his hat, and at the door was so fortunate as to meet Moses returning from the station. A word to the boy, who jumped out, handing his master the reins, and Leo was driving toward the Thornes'.

With what eager interest he gazed at each window of the cottage as he approached it! He tied his horse, went up to the door, and rang the bell.

Polly admitted him. "Good-morning, Leo," she said quietly.

He scanned her eagerly. "Is she here?"

"Yes, she is. Will you come in?"

He breathed a satisfied sigh, and walked into the parlor. "Will you tell her I am here, please?"

"No, I will not," returned Polly.

"Why not?" came the dismayed inquiry.

"Because I hope she is asleep."

"Oh!" Leo looked crestfallen. "When do you suppose she will wake up?" he asked rather lamely.

Polly gave an impatient laugh. "That's hard telling; but she won't leave her bed to-day."

"Isn't she well, Miss Polly?" with extreme anxiety.

She regarded him amazedly. "Perhaps you think it's just healthy exercise for a girl to dance all the evening and then walk here alone from The Eyrie."

"I thought I should be able to persuade her to go right back with me," said Leo, with acute disappointment; "still I would not have her disturbed for anything. I —"

"Say, Leo Graham, are you *all* simpletons up there at your house?" asked Polly with exasperation. "Do you suppose Irene Flanders is the kind of girl to do what she did last night and then to go riding home with you in a buggy this morning?"

Leo studied the carpet, then Miss Thorne's face, then the carpet again. By the time he reached Polly's eyes the second time, he had come to an understanding that this trouble, whatever it was, was a deeper one than his optimistic nature and his life-long faith in his aunt had led him to suspect.

"Do you know what happened to make Irene do this?" he asked, "for I do not."

"I don't know in detail. All I know is that your aunt came as near to breaking that poor child's heart as a woman can come, and that's enough for me."

Graham turned very red and then pale. "Aunt Emma doesn't know it," he exclaimed. "She was utterly amazed to find Irene gone."

Miss Thorne grunted. "I don't know," she said vaguely; then, as Leo frowned thoughtfully and kept silence, she added, "I wonder if I couldn't go back with you now and get Irene's clothes and things?"

"A few of them, you mean," he answered, turning to her quickly.

"Every stitch of them," said Polly composedly.

"Miss Polly," and he became whiter than ever, "you do not mean that she will not come back at all?"

"Of course I do. Why, how queer, Leo, that you don't give Irene credit for common sense! Hasn't she given your Aunt Emma the love and attention of a daughter all summer?"

"Of an angel!" he ejaculated fervently.

"Well, she creeps away in the middle of the night without a word to anybody. Now put two and two together."

"But if Aunt Emma apologizes humbly?"

"The apology was never framed," returned Miss Polly solemnly, "that would take Irene Flanders back to your aunt's roof."

Dead silence fell. Sweet came the breath of clove-pinks through the open windows. At last Graham slowly raised horror-stricken eyes to his companion. "Do you think, Miss Polly, — it is a wretched question to ask, but you know Aunt Emma well, — do you think she could have mentioned — me to Irene, in any — any offensive way?"

Polly looked confused, and the expression in the other's face made her tone timid as she replied, "I don't know anything about it for sure, Leo, but in my own mind I believe she did."

He drew a sharp breath. "This is terrible!" he exclaimed. "A monstrous thing!"

Miss Thorne was frightened. "I don't *know*, remember," she continued.

"Neither do I; but I shall know very soon. I do not believe it. I cannot believe it," with a gesture of repugnance. "Get ready, Miss Polly, I must go."

Polly hurried into her bonnet and shawl, and rejoining Graham they were soon driving at a sharp pace toward The Eyrie.

Miss Trowbridge, who had taken up her position

by a window to watch for the buggy, descried a woman beside Leo.

"It was soon done, he has brought her," she thought bitterly. "He has proposed and been accepted, for aught I know. How shall I have patience?"

But in another minute, to her surprise, she recognized Polly Thorne. Instantly she became defiant.

"So Polly is the champion of the afflicted," she thought. "What can she have come for? I hope she won't be tiresome. Polly *is* tiresome at times."

She bowed from the window, but did not go to the door, as was her wont for this old friend.

Leo ushered his companion in, and Polly's manner was too quiet to irritate her friend's worn nerves. She was tranquil and prosaic as usual.

"Good-morning, Emma," she said. "I have come to pack up Miss Flanders' clothes, if you will let me."

"My dear Polly, I cannot venture to dictate about Miss Flanders' clothes," returned Miss Trowbridge airily. "I presume she has expressed her wishes to you."

"Yes, she is going to stay with me till her father comes."

Miss Trowbridge raised her eyebrows. "Very well," she returned indifferently. "Her belongings

are all in the pink room, and her trunk is in the closet; however, perhaps I had better come up with you."

"After a while," said Leo, speaking for the first time. "Miss Polly knows the way and will excuse you a few minutes."

Miss Trowbridge started, and looking at his white face, listening to his stern voice, she comprehended that a boy had left her an hour ago, but that a man stood before her now. She prepared herself to meet the worst.

Miss Thorne, without another word, went up to Irene's room, and Leo came and stood before his aunt.

"It has taken me entirely by surprise to find this such a serious matter," he said. "It seems Irene has not described her interview with you to the Thornes, yet Miss Polly feels certain that even an apology from you would not bring her back to us."

Miss Trowbridge trembled. She was a brave, strong-willed woman, but her whole life was wrapped up in this grave man who had been her boy. She could not speak.

"This is a matter of life and death to me," continued Leo in a controlled voice, "for life without Irene would be deprived of its essence. It is barely

possible that I am involved in this misfortune. If I am, I want to know it. Did my name come into your talk last night?"

Absolute truthfulness was the habit of Emma Trowbridge's life, but if she could answer in the negative now she would be saved. She could trust Irene.

Who hesitates is lost. Being unpracticed in falsehood, she stammered, and Leo looked at her with terrible eyes. "Nothing but the truth between us, Aunt Emma. There never has been anything else."

"I did speak of you," she said desperately, and it seemed to her her heart was beating in her throat. "I told her I wanted you to devote your time to Miss Alden."

"Well, that is not all."

"Oh, don't ask me any more, Leo!" she implored nervously. "I am so — so hurt by your look and tone that my very memory fails." She burst into tears.

It was a frightful fact that he did not approach to comfort her. She seldom cried, and he had never before been able to withstand her tears.

"We will take plenty of time," he said quietly, "but I must have every word relating to me that you said to Irene last night."

The courage of despair rose within his aunt. She dried her eyes. "Supposing I refuse to speak further."

"You will not do that."

"I think I ought to. It would be better."

"Then we shall part, Aunt Emma, until you are ready to speak. We cannot go on with this between us."

She looked at him beseechingly. He waited in silence. At last he spoke with quiet persistence.

"What else did you tell her, Aunt Emma?"

"Remember, I did not know you loved her," was the broken reply.

"No; but you knew she was our guest — a young girl too."

Miss Trowbridge realized that there was no escape. She could not continue to refuse to speak without losing him, and so, little by little, he elicited the whole truth from her. It took time and patience, but he got it at last. His aunt was too frightened, too confused and overwhelmed, to soften her story, and so with all its force it came upon him.

A silence followed, during which an occasional sound overhead gave evidence of Polly Thorne's active preparations to remove the last sign of Irene's presence from the home where she had been so happy.

Leo sat with his elbows on his knees and his head resting in his hands. What was there to say? His aunt had roughly plucked the fruit he would have gathered so reverently, had brushed away its bloom and cast it aside, bruised.

"It is all a hideous nightmare!" he ejaculated hoarsely at last; then he started up and walked the room.

Miss Trowbridge dared not look at him. The air seemed charged with coming storm.

Finally he paused. "I am going to see if anything can be saved from the wreck you have made," he said in that strange, rough voice. "You have destroyed my faith in you, my admiration of you—"

"Not your love! not your love, darling!" she cried wildly, grasping the arms of her chair and shrinking with pale face and closed eyes as from a threatened blow.

"Who knows what we have left to hope for after this sacrilegious work?" he returned. "An angel in heaven might forgive. Irene may forgive. All depends on that."

He looked at the trembling woman a moment, started as though to speak further, then turned quickly and left the room.

His aunt heard him go out. She listened with

every sense alert. She heard him walking up and down, up and down, on a side piazza. Instantly she made up her mind as to the only course of action that remained to her, and hastened up the stairs with trembling limbs.

She hurried to Irene's room, burst in and closed the door behind her.

"Polly! Polly! you must help me!" she exclaimed, falling into a chair beside Miss Thorne, who was on her knees before the trunk.

Polly could only look amazedly into the flushed face.

"Stop packing! Don't take the things away! Irene must come back, and you must help me to persuade her!"

Polly sat down and looked gravely at the suffering woman. "That is impossible, Emma. How impossible, you know better than I do, for you know what was said to make the mischief."

"I will tell you. I will tell you all about it."

"Better not," said Polly, bravely denying her own curiosity. "I don't believe the experience was creditable to you, and perhaps it's better I shouldn't know the details. I judge you've been telling Leo."

Miss Trowbridge's assumed firmness suddenly gave way, and she burst into wild weeping. "My dar-

ling! my darling!" she sobbed. "Oh, my own boy! It will kill me!"

Polly pitied her from the bottom of her heart; but she felt helpless to give her comfort. "Don't, Emma, don't!" she said gently, then shook her head and sighed, her own eyes filling as she listened to the convulsive sobs. "Whatever comes, you need your strength, Emma. Don't waste it this way," she coaxed.

At last Miss Trowbridge regained her self-control by a great effort.

"You are right, Polly," she said tremulously. "This is losing time. I must not give way when I ought to be planning matters so as to bring us all into harmony again. I am perfectly willing to own that I have made a dreadful mistake. Leo does love Irene. I will apologize to her as humbly as she likes. I will go back with you now, Polly," her tearful face brightening with hope at the inspiring thought.

Miss Thorne shook her head slowly. "We are old friends, Emma. I hate to seem any way inhospitable, but if I should welcome you into my house now, it would be the same as driving Irene out of it, and the child hasn't a place to go to. I'll tell you what I will do. I will see how she feels about it,

and if I find her willing to see you, I'll send for you immediately."

"Well, do that, then," replied the other, glad to cling to straws. "And, Polly, let her know that you know that Leo loves her. Tell her I told you so. She cannot withstand that."

Miss Thorne paused in folding the pale pink morning gown that Irene had worn to so many happy breakfasts. "Emma Trowbridge," she said impressively, "after the things you said of Irene at the party, I'm not sure that Leo hasn't been mentioned to her once too often already; and if you'll excuse me, I'll keep off that subject en-tirely."

"Why?" urged Miss Trowbridge. "Of course she loves him." She seized Polly's arm appealingly, and the latter felt the trembling of her hand. "Leo will go to her," she continued. "Don't let her refuse to see him. You must have some influence after showing her so much kindness. I beg you to use it. If he does not succeed in talking with her — if she is not friendly to him, I shall be ruined! Why should she not be? What has he done? Oh, Polly do your best for me. I will never forget it."

"I will Emma," replied the other heartily. "I'll do the very best I can. I feel bad enough for Leo."

She felt still more compassionate of him when she

met him half an hour later outside the house. He had evidently been waiting for her, and as he approached, the words she had intended to speak died on her lips.

"Moses will go back with you," he said abruptly, and he will get an expressman for Irene's trunk. I shall come to your house to-morrow morning. She will be ready to see me then, you think?"

"I don't know," returned Miss Polly faintly. "I hope so."

Leo's eyes seemed trying to read her thoughts, and the smile he wore, Polly was wont to say afterward, went near to breaking her heart.

"I hope I need not fail in so much as that," he said. "From the day I first saw Irene I have never been less than loyal to her."

"I do think she will see you," answered Polly. "I — oh, dear!" she added despairingly, then without another word she ran down the steps and drove away.

CHAPTER XX.

IRENE'S ANSWER.

SUSAN'S blank surprise at the discovery that Irene was beneath the Thornes' roof may be imagined.

It was Polly who told her of the night's experiences, at a late breakfast after Phineas had gone to business.

Susan listened with ever-growing amazement and indignation. Her quick intelligence grasped every point in the situation with an intuition which approached clairvoyance. Her blue eyes grew dark, and indignant tears coursed down her cheeks. For once words did not come readily at her command.

"Do you know why this has come to Irene?" she asked at last.

"No, I don't," returned Polly.

"It is because she is too unselfish, too unconsciously noble, to think of herself or to defend herself," said Susan. "Another girl might have seen it coming. I do not know how much warning she has

had, but of course it wouldn't make any difference. Irene never suspects that other people are not just as generous as she is." Susan looked at her untouched plate, and became lost in grievous thought. "So she came to you?" she said at last, looking up at Polly. "She came to the right people."

"Well, I hope so," returned Miss Thorne. "She is going to stay with us awhile anyway."

Susan's face lighted, and she started up, came around the table, and kissed Polly impulsively.

"What a nice thing for you to do!" she exclaimed.

Susan was a dainty, undemonstrative creature, not much given to caresses, and the action pleased Polly, who smiled and sighed.

"A few weeks more," she said, "and you two girls will have flown. Then Phineas and I will feel stupid enough for a while; but until then I hope we shall be a very happy family."

"Yes, if Irene can be happy," returned Susan. "Oh, I do dread to see her, Miss Polly!"

A couple of hours after this conversation Leo came on his fruitless quest, and Miss Thorne went with him to The Eyrie. When she returned Susan saw that her eyes were red.

"I suppose you have seen nothing of Irene?" asked Polly.

"No, nor heard a sound from her room."

"I do hope she is asleep." Miss Thorne dropped into a rocking-chair. "Well, I'm tired," she added.

"I dare say you have passed through a scene. Did Miss Trowbridge make any objection to your taking the clothes?"

Miss Polly threw up her hands. "No, indeed. Emma Trowbridge is past making any objections to anything for the present."

"Does she begin to see that she went too far?"

"The poor woman is perfectly wretched. I believe she would give half her fortune to be able to put matters back where they were this time yesterday."

"What!" Susan's eyes were round. "Is it possible she cares for Irene enough for that?"

Miss Thorne looked dubious. "I don't know how much she cares for Irene; but Leo has been taking her to task."

"Well, that is the best thing I ever heard of him," returned Susan. "I hope he said at least one quarter of the things I should like to say."

"I imagine he left very little unsaid. I judge so from his aunt's appearance."

"Good!" ejaculated Susan heartily.

"Poor, poor fellow!" sighed Miss Polly. "Susan,

I don't know how to tell you the way he takes this to heart."

"I'm sure I should think he would be ready to drown himself if his aunt said to Irene anything of the sort we suppose she did, and has confessed it to him."

"He is coming to-morrow morning to see Irene. It would break your heart to see him."

"I guess not," returned Susan dryly. "If he had had ordinary common sense he would have fallen in love with Irene the first week he knew her, and long before this he would have married her, having locked his aunt up during the ceremony."

"What would they have lived on? That young man is as dependent on Miss Trowbridge as you are on your mother."

"Oh, well! I have no patience with either of them," said Susan. "They could not, and did not, appreciate Irene."

"Susan Farley," said Miss Thorne, leaning forward in her chair, "if it ever falls to your lot to be appreciated as Leo Graham appreciates your friend, let me tell you you will have secured a rare affection. I know something about this."

Polly was connected with a real romance at last, and she did not propose to have it belittled. Phineas

had told her that morning of the failure of Philip Layton's hopes, and the news had given her genuine disappointment. But Susan was inscrutable and Philip gone; she would not waste more thought on that affair.

Susan listened to her with earnest attention. "Then why did he not speak?" she asked. "There was no need to wait for Irene's father, and he knew that as well as anybody."

"My dear, we can't tell," returned Polly with dignity, "but I trust Leo. I know what he is. He isn't a demi-god, as his aunt thinks he is, but he's a good, honest young man, whose love any girl might be proud of. I never discovered a mean streak in him of any kind, and you may be certain he has meant to treat Irene just right. I am not going to let her refuse to see him when he comes, if I can help it."

"Why, the very sound of his name will hurt her," protested Susan.

"But why should he get all the punishment for his aunt's mistake? He hasn't done anything. He has been a good friend to Irene, and she isn't the girl I think she is if she refuses to recognize that."

Irene did not refuse. The next morning Miss Thorne listened for the first movement in the girl's

room, and soon after she heard it she asked for admission.

Irene received her cordially. "Would you like your breakfast up here this morning?" asked Polly.

"No, indeed! Three meals in bed are quite enough. I feel thoroughly rested this morning."

"Well, you look pale enough," thought Miss Thorne, but she spoke cheerily. "That is right. We shall be glad to get you down stairs." She moved a bottle from one side to the other of the bureau. Irene saw that she had something especial to say. "You know yesterday when I spoke to you about seeing Miss Trowbridge it was with an apology, and I only did it because I had promised. I wasn't a bit surprised at the way you took it. I didn't expect anything else; but this morning I want to speak of an entirely different matter. Leo is coming. He is coming to see you, and I beg you, dear child, not to visit his aunt's doings on him by refusing to see him."

Irene looked at her sadly. "Why can they not let me go?" she said wearily.

"But think how he must feel!" returned Polly earnestly. "You know best whether he has always been a good friend to you. Doesn't he deserve that

you should see him once at least? Try to be just, Irene."

Generosity, and the far rarer quality of justice, were inborn in Irene's nature. It was the result of long habit that she could instantly sink her own desires when she believed another's claims demanded it.

She reflected a moment; then she said, "I will see him."

The thought of the coming interview made the going down to breakfast, which she had been dreading, seem comparatively a trifling matter.

The family were in the dining-room when she descended. Upon her entrance there occurred to Susan the old fable of the stately swan who, when enemies cast mud upon its snowy plumage, sank quietly beneath the flood, and emerged in more dazzling purity than before.

She sprang to welcome Irene, who returned her kiss.

"It seems too good to be true that you are really staying here!" she said, a bright spot in either cheek.

"That she is at home here," corrected Phineas. "I hope she will soon feel that."

"I am sure I shall," said Irene cordially, her gentle face showing no trace of the sore heart whose tendrils

had twined so closely about that other home and been so rudely torn away.

The first breakfast under the new conditions passed off with unhoped-for ease. There was so much true kindness in the social atmosphere that awkwardness was banished.

When the meal was finished Irene asked to assist in Miss Polly's work, and the latter had far too much common sense to deny her. Phineas drove away, and the three women washed, wiped, and put away the dishes; then Irene and Susan went up stairs where the fresh air had been sweeping through the rooms, fragrant from Polly's garden. They made the beds and dusted the furniture, talking all the while of commonplaces, and commenting on the many conveniences Polly had arranged for her work.

"She does only the nice part of it," explained Susan. "A woman comes every day for a few hours to do all the heavy, disagreeable things."

It had never before occurred to Miss Farley that Polly's housekeeping was an interesting subject, but she dilated upon the details of it now, grateful for its hitherto unsuspected possibilities.

This diversion exhausted, she offered to help Irene unpack; but the latter preferred to postpone what was a dreaded ordeal. Nearly every article her

trunk contained would bring up associations that she could not yet face.

The morning was not half gone when the door-bell rang, and Miss Polly came up to announce Leo Graham.

Irene grew weak and cold, but the only evidence she gave of her tremors was her increased pallor. She passed Miss Thorne as though not daring to stay for a word, and went down stairs.

When she entered the room Leo was standing in a window with his back to her.

At her entrance he turned quickly and gave an exclamation, half of satisfaction, half of pain.

"I knew you were too kind not to see me, Irene," he said softly, clasping both her cold hands, which gave him back no answering pressure. "Come and sit down on this sofa." She yielded passively. "I feared I might be too early," he continued, seeming to satisfy a famished condition, as with his eyes he drank in every detail of her face. "I did not dream how necessary one human being can become to another until the eternity of yesterday dragged itself by. It is like going back to sunshine, to joy, to absolute rest and contentment, to be near you and to look into your eyes again; but you are too pale, Irene. You have suffered. What can I do to make

you forget it?" His face, as white as her own when he commenced speaking, slowly flushed.

"You cannot tell me," he continued after a pause, "and I am too dull to divine. I wish you could see into my soul and realize, as no words can convey to you, how wholly my life is yours, and must always be. I know now that I have loved you long. The light is in the sky long before the sun appears above the horizon; but now the sun has risen, and its radiance floods me. I realize what ineffable joy God grants to some of his children. You only can tell me if I am one of those, Irene?"

She returned his impassioned glance with infinite mournfulness. Alas, what might have been! Now a gulf yawned between them. Its cold breath seemed to chill her.

"Leo, why should this come to you?" she said sorrowfully. "Your life has been so serene, so happy. Is it because of that, I wonder?"

"But, Irene," he said quietly, pressing closer the hands he had not relinquished, how can it be that your personality, your nature and attributes, have become such a necessity to me, — seem to be so inextricably entwined in my life, and yet that you feel nothing of it?"

She shook her head hopelessly. "I only know that it is so," she replied with utter sadness.

"You do not love me?" with beseeching tenderness.

"I do not love you," she answered slowly.

He dropped her hands, turned from her, grasped the end of the high sofa back, and bowed his head on his arm.

Presently he shivered from head to foot, — the strong man, like an oak tree shaken by the tempest. The frail woodwork creaked in his grasp.

Irene watched him with curious pity, almost with a maternal yearning, yet she felt that she had no comfort to offer.

At last the struggle was over. Graham sat a moment motionless, then arose and walked to the other end of the little parlor. When he returned there was a smile on his white face.

He held out his hand. "Good-by, Irene," he said steadily.

"Good-by," she returned, rising and putting her hand in his.

"I can thank you for it all," he said. "It is not every man who has a clear ideal. I shall always carry mine here," he touched his breast, "and be true to it. I need not wish you happiness. It will never be long

frightened away from your noble heart. Do not be sad for me hereafter when you think this over. I shall get on." He moved to the door and stood there a moment with his back to her. "I shall get on," he repeated; then, without another look, he went out. Irene, from where she stood, saw him mount his horse and ride away.

The fortune of life's battle had turned against him, but it was a gallant retreat that the young soldier made.

Arrived at The Eyrie, he went to his room and immediately began packing his belongings into trunk and valise. His aunt had been listening for him ever since he left the house, and her heart beat wildly when she heard him return. What had been the result of his errand? What would she have replied to one who had dared tell her a month ago how earnestly she would pray to-day that Irene Flanders might deign to accept her nephew?

She could not explain to herself the sounds she heard when she stole near his room. At last she could endure the suspense no longer, and she came fearfully and knocked on his door.

Graham bade her enter, and she walked in. Her

breath seemed to go from her as she saw what he was doing.

"Where are you going, Leo?" she asked faintly.

He did not look up from his work. "I have not decided yet. To Boston first."

"Then — then — Irene —"

"Don't talk of it now, please."

She sank trembling upon the bed and unconsciously moaned aloud. He was going away and would not tell her where. She might never see him again. He would not write to her. She would drag out months and years with nothing to live for, her yearning love reaching out into vacancy. He would never forgive her.

She was too crushed at first to remember his financial dependence upon her; but after a minute it did recur to her.

"What money would you like to take with you?" she asked, striving to put the question as unconcernedly as she had always done.

"None, thank you. I have some in my pocket now. I hope to repay it to you soon."

Miss Trowbridge pressed her hand to her heart and bit her lip. How he hurt her!

"It is folly perhaps to talk about repaying you," he continued, "when I remember the thousands you

have spent on me. My education, my clothes, my travels. Why, it must amount to —"

"Leo, Leo!" she groaned, "do you owe me only money!" She fell face down upon the pillow and lay there in tearless misery.

The despair of her tone penetrated him. He stopped and looked at her. She had lived for him and only for him for more than twenty years, and there she lay, stricken down by his unkindness.

He had learned what suffering can come to the human heart through its love. He pitied her. He could not be sure she had stolen his happiness. Irene might never have learned to love him. At all events, his aunt was enduring anguish that he could alleviate. What if there were some hand, some voice, whose touch and sound could fill the aching emptiness within him!

He knelt beside the bed, put his arm across her shoulders and one hand on hers, while with the other he smoothed her hair.

She gave an inarticulate cry of surprise and joy, and nestled her cheek beneath his hand.

"I owe you everything that I am, Aunt Emma," he said gently. "When I am gone, remember that I realize it, and it will be a tie between us."

She did not speak, but clung to him as to joy recovered after hope had died.

"When you are gone! *Must* you go?"

"Yes, I must go."

"You must take money, of course."

"I have enough."

"Then you will be gone but a short time?"

"I cannot tell how long."

"Leo, are you going to separate yourself from me?" she asked acutely.

He hesitated. "Only in body," he replied.

"You mean that I have separated us already in spirit? But I am punished. Oh, how I am punished! Leo, I will not cheat myself. I know what this going away means. The life we have lived is ended. You are going to travel and try to forget, and you do not want me with you. To think that I have become —"

"You are mistaken," interrupted Leo. "I am not going to travel. I am going to work."

"To be independent of me? I know it. I understand."

"Do not let us reproach one another," he said wearily. "What is done is done."

She lifted her woeful eyes to his. "It will be a

new world to me; but I am grateful for your kindness," she said humbly.

Graham said nothing. His own pain came rushing back upon him. Truly, for him it was a new world, and with all his courage he dreaded to face it.

CHAPTER XXI.

SUSAN IS CALLED FOR.

POLLY THORNE and Susan, from an upstairs window, saw Leo ride away. The interview had been so brief that they shook their heads at one another.

Sympathetic Polly's eyes followed him wistfully. "He's a prize," she said warmly, "whether Irene thinks so or not."

"Miss Trowbridge will expect to see some convulsion of nature follow this," remarked Susan.

"What a pity! what a pity!" mourned Polly. "If Emma would only have behaved herself! Still," turning away from the window, "I don't believe in crying over spilled milk, and never did. Let us forget, and help Irene to forget. Time works wonders, but we can't hurry it up. The present is our concern."

"Irene's face shows what she has passed through," said Susan, "and this last trial must have been a hard

one, if you are right in your supposition about Mr. Graham's errand. I feel just cowardly enough to go and lock myself in before she comes upstairs. I believe I will go and write the last letter to my mother. The last letter! Think of it. Where has this summer gone?"

"Proctor hasn't been quite so bad as you feared," said Polly, smiling.

"I shall always remember Proctor with great affection," returned Susan gravely.

"Would you come to see us again some time?"

"Indeed it would make me very unhappy to believe that I should never come back here."

The sincere tone pleased Miss Thorne. "Let me tell you, my dear, that you have improved greatly since you came. Sometimes I find it hard to believe that you are the same girl who astonished me so one evening last June."

"I am not — quite. I can see that myself," returned Susan. "What shall we do about Irene?"

"Leave her to herself. You go and write your letter and I will sit here and do some sewing, and see her when she comes up."

Susan departed, and Miss Thorne had sat at her work but a few minutes when, through her open door, she saw Irene come slowly up stairs.

"I am sewing in here, Irene," she said. "Come in when it suits you."

The girl came at once, and sat down opposite her entertainer.

"This is such a shady window," continued Miss Thorne, threading her needle. "It always tempts me to sit down in the morning."

"It is pleasant," returned Irene calmly. "I have been thinking, Miss Thorne, that it is hardly worth while for me to unpack my trunk. It will be best for me to go at once to New York. There I can be near my father's business headquarters, and be more sure to know when to expect him, and it will save him the trouble of coming here."

Miss Thorne regarded the girl thoughtfully. Irene looked to her very much like a person who was on the eve of succumbing to an illness.

"I'm not going to force you to stay," she returned, "nor to urge you too much; but don't be too certain yet that it is best for you to go. I would prefer that you should stay. Phineas would prefer it. I only speak of that so as to be sure you have the right idea about that part of it. Now what is to be gained by your going and living alone in a boarding-house in New York while the weather is so hot? It won't hurt your father to come this far after you; and if

he doesn't feel like coming, he can send a telegram instead. I don't think you feel well, and it would be a satisfaction to me to see you as hearty as you ever were before you go. My disinterested advice to you, Irene, is to stay."

The girl smiled faintly. "It is certainly disinterested advice," she said.

"You need not fear being made company of. If you wish to be alone, you may be. If you wish to go out alone, you can. You shall be perfectly independent. I tell you plainly," added Miss Thorne in a tone of conviction, "there is no sense in your going."

"I appreciate your kindness very deeply," replied the girl. "I do not see why you are so good to me. I will not decide until to-morrow."

When to-morrow came, Irene, the moment she raised her head from her pillow, was seized with such giddiness that she was forced to lie quiet, and the only question considered by any of the household was how to hasten her recovery.

She allowed Susan to take some of the clothes from her trunk and to hang them in the closet; for it proved that several days passed before she was well enough to go down stairs.

Her temporary invalidism was made as pleasant as

possible. Miss Thorne often visited her room with a cheerful word, or some talk on housekeeping questions. Susan wrote or read within call; even Bijou chose to take numerous naps near her bedside, and occasionally poked his cool nose into her hand, and by the time she took her place at table again it was tacitly agreed among them all that she was not to go away.

By degrees Irene came into a more natural condition of mind, and her peculiar charm began to evince itself. She always knew just what thing to do to help Miss Polly. She beautified every room through which she passed. She saw without conscious effort what Phineas wanted, and placed it at his elbow. She mended Susan's dresses, and showed her new ways to fix her hair. It soon came to be, as it had been at The Eyrie, that the first inquiry made by one of the family on entering the house was for Irene. This pleased Susan greatly at first, then there came a time when it made her thoughtful, and she began to wonder how Irene did it, and to try very hard not to be jealous of the effect of her sweet ability.

Susan still gave the horse Jenny her rations of sugar every morning, and she and Thorne had a few

parting words, usually about the mare, or the weather, or Thorne's destination for the day.

"Do you hear anything of what is going on at The Eyrie now?" Susan asked him one morning.

"It is closed," replied Phineas. "Miss Trowbridge came to my office yesterday on business, shortly before she took the train."

"How did she look? What did she say?" asked Susan eagerly.

"She looked years older than on the night of Leo's birthday. The days since he went away must have been very sorrowful ones to her. She said very little that would interest you."

"Did she mention Irene?"

"Only once, and then rather bitterly. It is not worth while to say much about it. She would need to be superhuman to feel kindly toward one whom she has wronged, and who has made such a breach between her and her nephew."

Susan looked at him reproachfully. "Please don't try to make me pity her," she said with some indignation. "Now that you know Irene so well, you could not expect me to feel any pity for Miss Trowbridge."

"True," said Thorne, and sighed.

The sigh sent the color flying into Susan's cheeks.

"Isn't Irene all I ever said she was?" she continued.

"All and more."

Susan caught her breath and smiled, and patted Jenny's neck.

"Yes, I knew you would say so. Now you see how foolish you were to say you did not care to have me grow like her."

"Did I say so?" asked Thorne, stepping into the buggy and smiling, as he took the reins. "Well, I retract. Grow as like her as you can. Good-by."

Susan stood still a minute before going back to the house, and had her first open and avowed battle with the grim fiend, Jealousy.

It was hard that Irene should have come to the cottage where she herself had been at least a sort of pet, and should have completely cast her into shadow. She struggled against her own childishness as she called it. She insisted upon yielding Irene her due; but after that day her own manner changed. She took on a new, strange quiet, and saucy Susan Farley seemed to have disappeared from the face of the earth.

"I wonder if it can be that she regrets letting Mr. Layton go?" Polly used sometimes to wonder. She confided her surmises to Phineas, and it set him to

thinking very unpleasant thoughts, which, as usual, he kept to himself.

He schooled himself to have less and less to say to Susan. Irene's membership in the family made this possible without attracting attention, and he began to count the days that must elapse before Mrs. Cox would come and bear away the painful joy of his life.

She arrived one evening by the same train that had brought Susan. The latter was exceedingly fond of the mother who had petted and indulged her all her life, but the remembrance that her coming meant leaving Proctor tempered her joy at receiving her.

Mrs. Cox was a small woman, dressed with elegant simplicity. Her large eyes were surrounded with anxious wrinkles, and they looked enviously into Polly's smooth, fair face as the latter sat beside her in the parlor that evening.

"Oh, Polly, how have you managed it?" she exclaimed. "Why should Time stand still with you and stamp all over my face with his ugly crow's-feet?"

"Don't abuse yourself, mamma," said Susan. "I think the trip has made you look five years younger. How is Papa Cox?"

"Feeling very well. He thought he had better go

West immediately, because I knew I should want to stay a couple of days and look at Polly."

"You do not remember me, of course, Mrs. Cox," said Irene, "but I remember you very well from the time you used to visit Susan at school."

"Yes, you were one of those girls I used to see. I do not remember you, but Susan's letters have often referred to you this summer, so we are not quite strangers."

It was not until the following day that Mrs. Cox realized that the daughter she had come home to was not the daughter from whom she had parted. The discovery was led up to by a remark she made while she was arranging her satin-smooth hair before the mirror the next morning.

"I will own now, Susan, that I have been expecting for the last two months that you would mutiny against being left here so long. I realize just how dull it has been, but I had to push through and carry out the plan even though it did sacrifice you. I will make it up to you next summer somehow."

"You have wasted sympathy, then, for after the first week or two the dulness all vanished," replied her daughter. "I have enjoyed myself more than I should have done if I had gone to Europe."

Her mother looked at her in surprise. "Then Mr.

Layton had something to do with it," she said with some perturbation. "You said so little about him that I have not worried, for I will do you the justice to say that you have always been a frank girl."

"I did not want to worry you," replied Susan.

"Then he did have something to do with it."

"Yes, oh, yes," said the girl with an impatient sigh.

"Where is he now?"

"I don't know. He went away from Proctor nearly three weeks ago."

Mrs. Cox's face flushed. This perhaps explained the change in her daughter, a change which was becoming more evident to her with every succeeding minute. It would indeed have worried her to learn while she was away that the acquaintance she knew so slightly was besieging the citadel of her only child's heart, but it worried her even more to suspect that her gay, pretty Susan's affections had been trifled with. She did not believe that it would have made Susan permanently serious to refuse Mr. Layton.

"Well, you can tell me all about it now without fear of worrying me," she said, striving to exclude her anxiety from her voice.

"Mamma, dear, what is the use of reviving any-

thing that is over and done with?" said Susan. "He helped pass many a week for me here, and I think he was equally obliged to me. Then his visit ended, and he went away."

"What sort of an impression has he left on you? Did he prove himself dishonorable in any way? What an unfortunate woman I am! I did think I had found a safe corner for my pretty child!" exclaimed Mrs. Cox.

"Poor little mamma! You look ready to cry. I will tell you all about it. There is very little harm done. One day last month it suddenly dawned upon Mr. Layton that he cared for me. He tried to propose to me once, and I would not listen. The second time I did listen, and I think — I cannot tell, I am such a vain thing — I might have considered it if Mr. Thorne had not come in upon us and interrupted the proceedings. He said you had entrusted me to his care, and he relied upon Mr. Layton's and my honor to suspend every question of the kind until you came home."

"How good of him!" ejaculated Mrs. Cox.

"Mr. Layton answered Mr. Thorne in a way that opened my eyes to the fact that I did not and never could love him; so, after that, when he spoke to me

once more, I declined, and the next day he left Proctor."

Mrs. Cox embraced the speaker in an ecstasy of relief and satisfaction. "I shall not forget it of Mr. Thorne! What a good, faithful creature he is, if he *is* stupid!"

"Why stupid, please?" Mrs. Cox was surprised at the flash in her daughter's eyes.

"Oh, he did not say anything last night; just sat and looked on while we talked; but he is a kind, good creature."

"Say anything! How could he say anything when you were talking steadily? You know you and I are just alike about that, mamma. We do not give any one else a chance. He looked on; yes, and his look is a benediction!"

"Well, I have said the wrong thing evidently," laughed Mrs. Cox. "One thing is certain, — I feel very, very grateful to him for being the means of saving you from what might have been a sad mistake."

"And for showing me such patience and care, he and Miss Polly both, as no money and no thanks can repay. To think of leaving — of leaving Proctor!"

Susan turned away, but her mother was sure she had seen the shining of a tear. She was unspeaka-

bly surprised and puzzled. Her astonishment was augmented when, after breakfast, Susan, as a matter of course, tied on an apron and began clearing off the table in the neat way Polly had taught her.

"Why, Susan! why, Polly!" she exclaimed, and then she laughed, and as suddenly became grave. "Well, you have bewitched Susan!" she finished briefly.

Polly laughed. "Are you surprised to see her make herself useful? It won't do her any harm to know how."

"Oh, it is desirable in every way," returned Mrs. Cox, recovering herself. "No one can be gladder than I am. Only Susan — I am interested to know how you captured her."

"Force of example, I suppose," remarked Irene. "People that come to Miss Thorne's find themselves liking to be at work."

At this moment Phineas appeared at the dining-room door. "You said you would like to see me, Mrs. Cox, before I go to the office."

Mrs Cox rose with alacrity and followed him. They sat down in a little room off the back parlor, where Phineas had a writing-desk, and where the walls were lined with books. The lady immediately began to speak.

"I was really at a loss, Mr. Thorne, whether to make my business arrangements with regard to Susan's board and etceteras with you or with Polly, but I concluded you were the one. Susan says that money cannot repay you, and certainly my thanks are very sincere for your and Polly's kindness."

Phineas, resting his elbow on the open desk, shook his head.

"I never understood that there was to be a financial aspect to our receiving Susan."

"My dear Mr. Thorne," protested the other, "you did not think me quite so brazen as to invite my daughter here for three months wholly as your guest!"

"You may talk with Polly about it if you like. So far as I am concerned, Susan has paid her way, and I presume you will find it to be the same with Polly. If not," and he smiled, "she must accept half rates."

"I see you will not consider the subject seriously," returned Mrs. Cox, "and I shall have to talk to your sister. It is certainly very gratifying to me that Susan has won your hearts. I wish to thank you especially, Mr. Thorne, for saving the child from making any rash promises to Mr. Layton in my absence. She has been telling me all about it this morning."

"I am glad you spoke of that, Mrs. Cox. Polly and I have noticed that Susan has seemed very quiet of late, and my sister thinks it possible that she may be considering that she was hasty in dismissing Mr. Layton."

"I think not," replied the other confidently. "I am sure not."

"It might seem impertinent for me to suggest this," said Phineas, "but the fact that I opposed Susan's intimacy with him during your absence, makes me anxious, now that you are here, that Layton should have fair play, and encouragement if Susan can give him any."

"It is very honorable in you, I am sure," said Mrs. Cox politely. "I am not afraid that you allowed him to feel unfairly treated. After all," she added, with a smile that for the moment gave her a look like her daughter, "if you find yourself fearing that you were too severe, you may take comfort in the reflection that had Susan cared very deeply you could not have prevented the match. As it is, she expresses complete indifference for Mr. Layton."

Thorne smiled. "Then the loss of her vivacity remains to be accounted for," he remarked.

"Oh, I think it is the effect of the quiet life and surroundings. Susan has always been accustomed

to variety. Not that she has been discontented. No, indeed. I should not be so frank were it not that she assures me she has been very happy here. Well," rising, "I must not detain you longer."

Thorne also rose. "I should be glad, Mrs. Cox, if you would write me after you have been at home a few weeks, — but I forgot, Susan will be sure to correspond with Miss Flanders. I was going to say that I should be glad to learn that she was herself again."

"I will see to it that you do," replied Mrs. Cox as she went out.

Phineas went back to his desk and sat down. He drew writing materials near him, but before he could dip his pen in the ink his thoughts wandered.

How long he had sat absorbed in meditation he could not tell, when a sharp cry startled him.

It was followed by a confused buzz of voices. He hurried into the dining-room, and beheld Irene lying white and motionless in his sister's arms, while Susan and her mother endeavored by rubbing and fanning to restore the fainting girl.

"Oh, Phineas!" exclaimed his sister at sight of him, "do come here and help me. This poor child's father is dead."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE WOE OF PARTING.

MRS. COX, when she returned to the dining-room after her interview with Phineas, fell to talking with the others about her voyage. She spoke of the principal incidents of the journey, mentioning as the most exciting event the sudden death of a passenger, a New Yorker returning home after a successful business trip, during which he had realized twelve thousand dollars, a fact concerning which he was very communicative. He had been a noisy, noticeable sort of man, and every one on board knew him, so his sudden death by apoplexy had been felt by all. He had been buried at sea, and the ceremony had been a saddening event long to be remembered. His name was Richard Flanders.

The startled exclamation that greeted the latter bit of information, and poor Irene's shriek, amazed Mrs. Cox, who uttered a cry as she observed the girl's increasing pallor and the sigh with which she swayed

toward Polly. In another half-minute Phineas appeared.

Very soon Irene was sufficiently revived to be helped to her room, where Polly remained closeted with her the remainder of the morning.

From that time Mrs. Cox seemed seized with a nervous anxiety to start for home. It seemed to her that she had endured here only a succession of unpleasant surprises. She paid no heed to Susan's evident reluctance, but pushed forward every arrangement with an unrelenting hand.

They were in their room together that afternoon when she stopped in her packing to gaze at her daughter.

"I am not sure that I shall ever forgive myself for letting you come to this place, Susan," she said in pure bewilderment at the inattention the other had paid to a description she had been giving of a ball dress she had procured for her in Paris, which had been forwarded to Chicago in one of the trunks. "You are not the same girl at all."

"Well, you ought to be glad of that," returned Susan. "Perhaps I am a less troublesome girl. You cannot tell till you try me."

"But you are low spirited. You have had the life slowly pressed out of you in this awful place,

with no companionship but that solemn-eyed, white-faced girl and these middle-aged people."

"Do you call a man of thirty-five middle-aged?" asked Susan stiffly.

"Compared with you, yes."

"It never seems ridiculous to you that I should dance and go to theatre-parties with Mr. Stiles or Mr. Reynders," naming two perennial society men, "yet I believe they talked the same nonsense to you that they do to me. As for seeing any of their thirties again, that is out of the question."

"My *dear*, who said that anything connected with Mr. Thorne was ridiculous?"

"I am not going to let you speak slightingly of him," said Susan, her lip trembling ominously. "Oh, mamma," struggling with heavy sobs, "can't you see what is the matter with me? I must speak or my heart will burst. Can't you see that I — I —"

"Mercy on me!" groaned Mrs. Cox, suddenly enlightened. "Susan! Susan! this is infatuation. Don't believe in it, my dear. Don't let it frighten you. It is only a morbid kind of gratitude." She came and embraced the girl as they sat together on the side of the bed. "Speak softly, control yourself, darling. I should have had the horrors too if I had been here three months. I am not wondering at you

in the least; but I know that as soon as we are on the cars I shall begin to get my own child back again."

"Mamma," Susan returned her caress, "you know I love you dearly. No one ever had a kinder, sweeter mother than you have been to me; but what shall I do? I do not belong to myself any more, and I cannot come back to you as the same girl I was. I am simply crushed at the thought of leaving here. I love him, and I hardly care who knows it. I sometimes wish there were any way I could let him know it, for he is so kind to everybody he would think of some way to help me bear it. Oh," very earnestly, "tell everybody you know who has a little girl not to let her have everything she wants, because there will come a day when she must be denied, and self-denial is so terrible when one has had no experience."

"This — this is awful!" gasped Mrs. Cox, her breath taken away by the intensity and rapidity of her daughter's speech. "Oh, Susan, you're unwomanly — and you are so mistaken. If such a dreadful thing should happen to you as Mr. Thorne's returning your — your fancy, and you were settled right here in Proctor, with nothing but church sewing societies to interest you all winter, how long would it be before you would begin to think of home, and all your young friends, and to long for the pretty, luxurious

entertainments you have been accustomed to all your life? You are as much out of your mind as though you were in delirium, if you believe otherwise. You would coax your husband to let you go home for a visit, and the visit would grow to be months long, until in order to preserve even the semblance of contentment you would spend every winter in Chicago, and then exist through the summers here — that is, supposing Mr. Thorne were so indulgent as to allow it."

"Oh, mamma, I would give years of my life to believe you."

Mrs. Cox searched her memory for all it could render up regarding Phineas Thorne's looks and manner that could explain this amazing phenomenon, and obtained no satisfaction, unless the conviction that he was the absolute opposite of her daughter in everything could be counted as such.

"There has been a time now and then when I have thought he did care for me more than in friendship," pursued the girl; "but after Irene came here it was different. He admires her immensely, and, now her father is dead, she will stay indefinitely, and he will probably marry her. She is the loveliest girl, the best girl that ever lived, and she has had very few good times, and I have had a great many; and so I

suppose things are going to be evened up. I did not give up every hope until you came out of his room this morning. I had thought there was a little chance, one tiny chance, that he would speak to you of me on his own account. I thought he might if I had read certain signs right; but all signs fail with such a philanthropist as he is. His help and kindness go out so freely to everybody, those signs meant nothing. The instant I saw your calm face I knew they had meant nothing."

In Mrs. Cox's fright and desperation she gave the weeping girl a little shake. "My child," she exclaimed, "be still. Supposing Polly should hear you. Is it really true that you have felt all this, and yet have exercised such perfect self-control that no one here suspects you?"

"I do not think any one does," said Susan listlessly. "I have not known it very long, and afterward jealousy of Irene sustained me."

"I am just as sure you will get over it when we get home as I am that I sit here," returned Mrs. Cox with a sudden access of firmness. "Now lie down on this bed while I finish packing. We will go in to Boston to-night."

"If Mr. Thorne thinks that is the best plan," added Susan.

Mrs. Cox looked at her, amazed. "Decidedly the best plan would be for us to start before he returns."

Susan, who had lain down, returned her mother's glance curiously. "Do you suppose I would go without seeing him?"

"Then be careful what you tell him with your eyes or lips."

Susan shook her head with a smile. "If I told him all, he would not despise me."

"Well, we won't try the experiment," returned Mrs. Cox dryly, mentally blessing the wonderful hair-breadth escape Phineas had made from detecting her daughter's folly. "You would despise *yourself* — afterward. Wait until your pleasant social engagements are four deep; then cast your thought back to Proctor, half buried in a snow-drift, and see which you would choose."

Mrs. Cox began to understand the glamour which had been thrown over humble household occupation.

She began to understand many things, and to experience many a sensation of gratitude that after all she was in time. She prosecuted her work of packing with feverish haste.

"I think it would be kinder to Miss Flanders if I were to hurry away," she said later to Polly. "It must be painful to her to see me. I have not any-

thing pleasant to say to her about her father. He drank a good deal, and played poker, and although every one felt shocked and sad when he died, nobody admired him. I do not feel quite easy about Susan, either. She is not well, and I am in haste to get her home; so you mustn't mind, Polly, if we leave a day earlier. Perhaps we will go to Boston this evening."

"Well, Isabel, you must do what you think best. We'll see what Phineas says," replied Miss Thorne placidly.

Phineas had very little to say to the plan. He was disappointed to find how false had been his supposed anticipation of Susan's departure. He found that he longed intensely to keep the rose, notwithstanding its sharp thorn; but he only nodded assent to the new plan, and turned Jenny's head back again toward the village, that he might order the expressman and a carriage for the proper hour.

Mrs. Cox kept vigilant watch and ward over her daughter while they remained on dangerous ground. Susan gained admission to Irene's room, and the two friends mingled their tears. The latter's new shock made her slow to perceive that her friend's grief was not all unselfish and for her bereavement. A terrible bereavement, Irene felt it. Her father, careless, indifferent, divided from her by the Atlantic, had been

nevertheless her father, a substantial barrier between her and absolute solitariness. His home-coming had been the one sure thing before her. She had foreseen with certainty the boarding-house life that they should take up again together. She had resolved to be a more cheerful companion to him than she had ever been, sustained by the hope that as he grew older he might come to feel some degree of dependence upon her. She had resolved to connect herself with some organized charity, and to throw her whole soul into the work, to leave no time for realizing neglect, no time for depression. Now she was really alone in the world; superfluous, except as she might endear herself to one and another by useful work. No one would claim her. To no one was she necessary. Many might be kind to her. No one needed her. These mournful thoughts were holding her in their grasp when Susan's soft arms were thrown around her neck in a farewell embrace.

"Oh, Susan, how dear you are to me now," she said brokenly, "when I can count my friends on the fingers of one hand! You are really going to-night?"

"Most reluctantly," returned Susan, sobbing. "It is the saddest parting of my life."

Irene was deeply touched. "What a kind heart yours is!" she said. "You appreciate, enjoying your

mother's loving care, what it must be to feel that in all the world there is not one to whom I am bound by the blessed tie of relationship. I am dreadfully, dreadfully alone, Susan."

The latter forgot her own woes in a remorseful wave of pity. "Dear Irene, you have these good people for true, loving friends. Mr. Thorne is devoted to you. Forgive me if I am sufficiently clairvoyant to see him in future with the right to comfort you. I—"

Susan had forced herself to speak so far, but here her tongue rebelled. She ceased crying and was silent, with her head on Irene's bosom.

"That will never be," returned Irene with a weary sigh. "Yes, they are very kind,—incredibly kind."

"And I prophesy you will learn to appreciate Phineas Thorne as he does you," said Susan softly.

"I do that now. But I tell you his heart is given elsewhere." In Irene's present mood, Susan's persistence irritated her. She felt her companion give a violent start.

"He has made a confidant of you, then?" exclaimed Susan, suffering a double pang of jealousy.

"I discovered his secret; but do not ask me any more."

Susan's heart beat violently in the pause that followed.

"You will write to me, Irene," she begged at last, "and tell me all that goes on every day. I shall be so homesick. Remember, every trifle will interest me."

Irene promised in a distrait, preoccupied fashion.

"And you will come and make me a long, long visit some time. Perhaps next winter. Do count my friendship as a little something, Irene."

"I do. It is more to me than you think. I am sorry you are going to-night, for as yet I am like one in a bad dream, longing to awake. I shall wish I had said more to you when you are gone, but I feel so dull and blank now."

"Write it all to me. Every word will be precious. There is mamma, calling. Good-by, Irene, good-by."

Mrs. Cox was indeed calling. She wished Susan to eat her supper before Phineas returned, for the pale face had better not sit opposite him too long.

The girl's evident distress went to Polly's heart. She ascribed it in great measure to sympathy for Irene; but there was no mistaking the genuine sorrow with which Susan finally kissed her and declared chokingly that she should be homesick.

The girl was finally pushed by her mother into the

carriage, very tear-stained as to countenance, and very smart as to travelling dress, and the start was partly accomplished; only partly, because Phineas sat on the opposite seat, and there were still appearances to maintain.

"No doubt you know, Mr. Thorne," observed Mrs. Cox briskly, "that Susan is not generally a lachrymose young woman; but the shock to poor Miss Flanders, combined with the parting from Polly and you, who have really been like a mother and father to her for so long, have quite dissolved her. — Put on this veil, Susan," taking one from her bag.

Susan repulsed her. "I have cried my last tear," she said briefly.

Phineas did not attempt conventionalities as to the parting, but conversed with Mrs. Cox on indifferent subjects until the depot was reached. He bought the tickets, checked the baggage, then Mrs. Cox, having fallen into conversation with the agent concerning Bijou, whose eyes looked pensively out from under her arm, he found himself able to exchange a word with Susan, who gazed into his face with a white, settled look of hopelessness, which would have puzzled him had he not been oppressed with a paralyzing sense of the brevity of the time remaining.

"You have been unhappy of late, Susan," he said low and quickly. "It is time you should go."

"I have been happier than I shall be,—than I can be," she responded wretchedly.

"I don't know what you mean," he replied dully. "You have been a great comfort to us,—to your adopted father," he added.

Susan's lips moved but would not utter her words.

"I have done my duty by you," he said in the same low tone; "you will never know how well. I—"

"Our train, Susan!" cried Mrs. Cox, suddenly becoming beware of the *téte-à-téte*, and by no means certain that her wilful daughter would not betray at this last minute all she would have her conceal. "Good-by, Mr. Thorne. I am very grateful to you," she added with a nervous hand-shake. Then she hurried forward, followed by her miserable companions.

"Good-by," said Thorne unsteadily, offering his hand to Susan as they walked. The girl took it in both of hers, unconscious how she clung to it as they watched the approaching train, which seemed to her like a great, noisy, blazing dragon coming to drag her from her happiness.

Thorne, with his free hand, helped Mrs. Cox to ascend the step, then he looked down into Susan's

eyes, which were speaking with the grief she could not conceal.

"I cannot say any good-by to you!" she exclaimed. "Imagine everything you would like to have me say, and think that I have said it."

The bell rang, the wheels moved. She was above him on the platform. "Everything?" he repeated, with sudden, strange bewilderment, looking with earnest eyes into hers.

"Everything."

He heard the answer, he saw the look. He was modest, he was somewhat slow in his mental processes; but by the time the last car drew by him his decision was made, and he stepped upon the rear platform.

Once on the swift-speeding train, he paused a minute to think; but thought only fired his blood and set his heart beating with joyful eagerness. He could not be mistaken; yet why should, how could such a wonderful thing be true? And all the time, as he thought and wondered, and gloried in his sudden hope, there was the blissful sense that he was near her. By this time they would have been separated. Now a few steps would bring him to her. He would not wait longer. He would go through the train. Her face, when she saw him, would either con-

tradict its previous confession by evincing only surprise, or it would verify it by — well, Phineas knew how he wished that she might look.

He entered the car and passed through that and another before entering the one which contained his beloved. He saw her at once, sitting by her mother's side. Her back was toward him. Her head drooped forward. How well he knew every tendril in those light curls that appeared beneath the up-tilted back of her hat!

He felt unsteady as he approached and stood in the aisle beside her. Everything depended on her action when she saw him. It was a dangerous test to apply, had he only known it, for Susan in public was a very conventional young lady; but she looked up now, and became red and pale, red and pale. She brushed her eyes with her gloved hand, but he did not disappear. She put her hand in the one he held out, and it was the same hand that had clung to his on the Proctor platform. She seemed unable to speak, but her eyes spoke for her. They said more than Phineas could decipher; but one thing was clear to him, they were the gladdest eyes, — glad even with their shade of dismay, — that he had ever seen.

"Mamma," said Susan for her mother's face was

still turned toward the dark window, "here is Mr. Thorne."

Mrs. Cox's start was quite as marked, but less complimentary, than that her daughter had given a moment before. She laughed a trifle hysterically. "Why, what does this mean?" she said.

"It means that I have business in Boston," returned Thorne, continuing to hold Susan's willing hand until the latter, by force of her mother's glances, was forced to withdraw it. "What time does your train leave in the morning?"

"We do not leave until the evening train," said Susan quickly.

Her mother bit her lip in vexation.

"That is fortunate," said Thorne, "for my business is with you, and I should like a whole day in which to transact it. I suppose I may take this seat?" and he took possession of the seat in front of theirs.

Mrs. Cox leaned back in despair. All her efforts had been in vain, and she felt excessively ill-used and very angry, both with her daughter and Thorne. She knew that such a feeling was useless, and not likely to assist her in securing Susan's happiness, which was the only end she had in view, and she set to work steadily to overcome it and to decide how to

couch her objections in the interview which she saw impending.

As for Susan, for the first time in her life she would have been unable to frame a wish. Thorne had followed her, and now sat so near that she might touch him. She worried herself with no misgivings lest she had laid herself liable to his pity. The first suspicion of joyful discovery had thrilled her when he said that she would never know how well he had done his duty. The rest had followed too confusedly for her to analyze.

Nothing mattered. The train was rushing along, — the same train that had been so uncomfortable, so ugly, so ill-lighted, a few minutes ago. Now no *chef d'œuvre* of Pullman could rival it, for it was carrying her straight toward the fulfilment of her dreams. She looked again at Thorne's side-face as he leaned against the frame-work of the window, and felt her heart swell.

It was true. He was really there. All safety, all strength, all happiness, lay in that.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WORLDLY WISDOM.

ARRIVED in Boston, after a silent journey, Phineas put the ladies and their belongings into a carriage, inquired which hotel they desired to be taken to, and informed the driver, then asked Mrs. Cox if he might call on her at ten o'clock on the following day. She gave him an affirmative answer. He lifted his hat and said "good-night," and the carriage drove away; then he went back into the depot, and sent a reassuring telegram to Polly, and afterward took his way to the hotel which Mrs. Cox had named.

Promptly at ten o'clock on the following morning he sent his card to her room and received the expected summons. He did not find her alone as he had expected, and he tried to surmise, in the moment when his eyes met Susan's, whether it had been her desire or her mother's that she should be present at the interview. The girl's shyness, if somewhat

tardy, evidently overcame her now, and a brilliant color stained her cheeks; yet at the first word her mother spoke she seemed to lose this self-consciousness.

Mrs. Cox advanced with a pleasant smile and shook hands with Thorne, and indicated a chair in which he seated himself without embarrassment.

"I cannot be sure whether or no you have divined my errand, since your daughter is present," he said, looking at Susan with a lingering expression by no means new to her, excepting in her reading of it.

"My daughter is a spoiled child, Mr. Thorne," said Mrs Cox seriously. "She insisted on being present."

Susan, still standing near the window where she had been when Thorne entered, looked imploringly at him. "I, — mamma, — " she said confusedly.

"She could not quite trust me," explained Mrs. Cox with a tinge of severity. Evidently mother and daughter had had an exciting argument.

Phineas rose impulsively as if to follow the glance he sent Susan.

"Please sit down," exclaimed Mrs. Cox sharply, and he obeyed.

"Now tell me frankly," he said, turning toward her, "the things that have frightened Susan. She

need not fear you will hurt my feelings, for nothing that you will say can exceed the arguments I have used against my own desires in the past two months. Until my sudden determination last evening to come here and tell you all the truth, I had as little belief in the possibility that my hopes might be realized as you could have had."

"You have behaved with extreme good sense, admirable good sense, if, as you say, you have been battling this fancy for two months," returned Mrs. Cox.

Susan clasped her hands, held her breath, and looked earnestly at Phineas, who was not looking at her.

"It is a pity that my daughter's agitation, or anything in her manner, led you to resolve to abandon your prudent course."

Susan caught her lover's eye, shook her head vigorously, and moved slowly nearer.

"It is not necessary for you to say to me," continued Mrs. Cox, "what you would prefer to say to Susan. This is far too important a matter for me to pretend to misunderstand you in it. Susan is my only child. I have no ambition for her further than that she should be happy. Your humble circumstances do not constitute a weighty objection to me,

but I have many objections to your marrying my daughter. As you saved her from Mr. Layton, I feel that I ought to save her from you; and if I do, it will be as much to your advantage as it is to hers."

Susan was now at the back of her mother's chair. She had utterly forgotten herself in tenderness for Phineas and dread of her mother's hardness. He looked up at her with such a strong, reassuring expression, that a warm sense of comfort stole around her heart.

"Be perfectly frank, Mrs. Cox," he said. "I too desire Susan's happiness beyond all else. Surely, between us, we shall compass it."

"If you married her," went on Mrs. Cox quickly, "you would have a pretty bird in a cage. Before very long the bird would begin to beat its wings against the wires and pine. You have nothing to give it to which it has been accustomed."

"What I have told myself a thousand times," returned Thorne, looking at Susan longingly.

The tenderness in her face was extinguished in a flash of indignation, and she pulled at the vinaigrette that hung at her waist.

"I am a little tired of being told what I might do," she said rebelliously.

"She is the last creature in the world Polly would expect you to marry," continued Mrs. Cox. "She can clear off a table and wipe a cup, but if you imagine for one moment that she could cook a meal or iron a shirt, you are utterly mistaken. She is not the sort of girl who would ever learn to do it."

Susan watched him anxiously. To this she had nothing to say. The charge was true. How would he take it?

Apparently he remained firm under the shock, for he smiled in an amused fashion, and Mrs. Cox admitted, with some surprise and real reluctance, that he was almost handsome when he smiled.

"That might be overlooked," he said.

"Susan will not have any money," added Mrs. Cox. "I do not say it with any offensive intent. I do not suppose you have thought about it, I only mention the fact. She is a girl of luxurious tastes, who will not have any means of her own to gratify them after she leaves me."

"My tastes are not very expensive," put in Susan stoutly.

"Be still!" returned her mother curtly. "Your being here at all is very absurd; but at least do not interrupt me. — She does not know enough of the value of money to know what is expensive."

"A very poor way to bring up a daughter," remarked Thorne, humorous twitches still at the corners of his lips.

"Well — well — so it is," admitted Mrs. Cox, rather disconcerted. "I venture to say you have scarcely a taste in common with her," she continued firmly.

"Oh!" exclaimed Susan. "She does not know about Jenny!" with a vivid glance at Thorne.

"You are too old for her."

"Mamma!" exclaimed Susan thrillingly.

Mrs. Cox continued, unmindful of her. "You are a sensible man. Let me take her home without a word more between you, and in three months she will write you that she sees her mistake."

Phineas was staggered. He turned white at the tone of conviction; but before he could speak Susan glided past her mother and fell on her knees at his side. Instantly their hands clasped and their eyes met, and after that neither feared.

Mrs. Cox looked on in disapproval. "I hope you will take my advice and wait three months before you make any promises to one another."

"That shall be as Susan likes," said Thorne quietly. "It may relieve you somewhat, Mrs. Cox, to know that my circumstances are not so humble as you suppose. Susan can have many of the luxuries of

life still. I can go into details with you later. At present, may I ask to see her alone a few minutes?"

Mrs. Cox hesitated only a moment, then withdrew to the next room without another word.

The instant the door closed, Thorne's quiet manner vanished. With Susan in his arms, close to his breast, he kissed her mouth, and eyes, and hair. He kissed her hands as though he would satisfy weeks of longing. Then he looked into her happy eyes.

"Do you love me in spite of all those bugbears, Susan?"

She sighed happily. "I love you! Oh, how I love you!" she answered.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IRENE THE PEACE-MAKER.

MISS THORNE was in the window when her brother returned, and shook a threatening forefinger at him before she came to open the door.

"Your telegram didn't arrive till the next morning," she said, "and I came near sending the town crier out after you. Do give an account of yourself."

Phineas gave his sister an embrace so unusual that she pushed him off at arm's length to look into his radiant face.

"Why, what in the world's the matter with you?" she asked. "Had a fortune left you? You look so gay I'd hardly know you."

"The best thing that can happen to any man has happened to me. I am going to be married, Polly!" As he spoke he seized his sister, lifted her far above his head, and laughed up into her face before he set her down lightly.

Polly lost her color and looked at him vacantly.

"Isn't it a wonderful, an incredible thing that she loves me!" Phineas, so undemonstrative and elder-brotherly in his usual manner to his sister, again took her in his arms and pressed his cheek to hers.

The action carried her back in a flash to the time when she was a girl in her teens and he a little fellow in dresses coming to her for a mother's sympathy. It was an awful moment to the devoted woman. Pain, love, bewilderment, all struggled within her.

"Why have you left me so long in the dark?" she said tremulously. "Who is this Boston woman? Forgive me, Phineas," with a convulsive sob, "I can't help it at first. I hate her just this minute. I shall get over it."

"Hate her!" repeated Phineas with a laugh. "That is good! Why, Polly, who could it be but Susan!"

"Susan," said Polly, staring at him. "Susan!" she repeated, almost in a shriek; then she laughed and cried simultaneously, Phineas looking aghast at her, puzzled and helpless, until Irene came hurrying into the room in a fright at the sounds.

Thorne turned to her with a long breath of relief. "Miss Flanders, I have just been telling Polly of my engagement to Susan," he said eagerly. "What — what does she mean?"

Then Irene showed herself the young woman of tact and resource that she was. Her face glowed in her joy for Phineas, and she managed to offer him one sympathetic hand while with the other she gave Miss Thorne a little shake.

"Miss Polly, this isn't like you. You are worrying Mr. Thorne just in the happiest time of his life, when you know that you would make any sacrifice for him."

The familiar voice, sounding for the first time in emphatic reproof, had its effect on the hysterical woman, who made a strong effort toward composure.

"Let us sit down," suggested Irene, slipping an arm around Miss Polly, and signing to Phineas that he should seat himself on her other hand.

"I wish it could have been *you*, Irene," ejaculated Miss Thorne as she subsided upon the sofa, "if it had to be anybody."

"Surely you love Susan, Miss Polly."

"As *Susan*, yes; but what in the world can Phineas do with her for a wife, — a *wife?*"

"Make her very happy, since they love each other."

Polly lowered her handkerchief and looked across Irene at her brother. The expression of his face showed his hurt and disappointment.

"I shall feel dreadfully some day to think of the way I'm behaving now," she said. "I know it as well as I know anything. I'm not a mite better than Emma Trowbridge; but give me a little time. I never in all my life had such a surprise nor such a shock. Don't be hard on me, Phineas!" and she shed more tears quietly.

"All right, Polly. I am disappointed, of course, at this reception, but I suppose you have never suspected what has been consuming me for so many weeks."

"Who could suspect it?" said Miss Thorne. "You kept your secret well, surely."

"He behaved as he always does about everything, Miss Polly; but we will spare his blushes and not praise him to his face. Let us talk of Susan instead. *Now* what do you think of that seriousness and sedateness that has puzzled you so?"

Polly smiled faintly in sympathy with Irene's soft laugh, and looked into space with her swollen eyes. The girl saw her advantage and pursued it. "You have been too partial a sister, Miss Polly, not to be pleased to think that the woman your brother has won is so wholly absorbed in him. Her grief on that last day, too! I confess I never suspected what made her seem so heartbroken."

Miss Polly's smile was still there and her reflective look began to have less pathos in it.

"Why, she almost made me believe she was in love with me," she returned, with a dim sense of humor.

"She is such a dear little thing," said Irene warmly. "Wouldn't it have been forlorn if Mr. Thorne had come back from the station that evening without knowing what was making her so unhappy? It would have been just like one of these exasperating stories that ends badly when it might just as well end right. Oh, how thankful you ought to be, Miss Polly!"

Miss Polly began to be a little bewildered and uncertain.

"I know what this must mean with Susan," continued Irene. "You know her bringing up and the sort of things her happiness has centred in until now, and here she wants to relinquish them all because she truly loves a good man who cannot — cannot —"

"Go right on," said Phineas with a smile. "Her mother went into all these particulars and fought a good fight against us."

"Oh, did she, indeed!" exclaimed Polly, dropping her hands in her lap. "Isabel Cox fought it, did she?"

"With very good reason, from her standpoint,"

returned Phineas. "She tried to frighten Susan with gloomy pictures of privation — "

"Well, if I ever!" interpolated Polly hotly.

"And of my age."

"Age!" exclaimed Polly, with an angry laugh. "Well, well, well! What simple folks there are in this world! What did Susan say?"

Phineas shook his head slowly. "That wouldn't bear repetition."

"It didn't budge her?"

Thorne smiled. "It didn't seem to."

"Phineas," said Miss Polly earnestly, "I told you, you know, that there was a good deal to Susan. It was strange I couldn't seem to make you see it as I did. You know I said there was a *way* about her. So Isabel Cox didn't want it!" Polly's cheeks became redder, if possible.

"But she submitted very gracefully in the end," said Phineas.

His sister looked at him wistfully. "You must have had a whole day with them," she said.

He nodded with a smiling, far-away look, as if it was easy to live it over.

"I don't realize it yet," said Polly, with a sigh that was half a sob. "It is too much to ask of me; but oh, Phineas, dear, — no, you mustn't go

away, Irene, you are one of us now. I do congratulate *her*, and maybe to-morrow I'll congratulate you."

"If not to-morrow, then some day surely," returned her brother, "for I am too fortunate for you not to realize it sooner or later. — Now, Miss Irene, as to your affairs. Just now at my office I found a telegram from a friend in New York who knows that you are with me, and who has promised to look thoroughly into your father's business affairs, and who will consult with me as to the best investment to make of the money he has left; that is, provided you wish to abide by our advice."

Irene's pale face colored with surprise. "You must have been wonderfully prompt in acting for me, Mr. Thorne. I can only repeat my thanks for your favors."

"I am glad to be of service to you, as you know. In a day or two you will know just what means are at your command. I hope you will be contented to stay with us until your affairs are settled up and everything is in good trim."

Irene did not trust her voice to speak. She was grateful for this true hospitality; but that which moved her so deeply was the ever-recurring fact of her loneliness, her aimlessness, contrasted with the

lot of those around her. After a few minutes of this bitterness, she would be glad for Phineas again, and very, very glad for Susan; but at present she was conscious only of her own bewildering loneliness.

She excused herself after a minute, and left the room. Polly's wild words recurred to her. Supposing it had indeed been herself whom Phineas loved, and she were going to marry him and settle down here to a quiet, protected life, instead of going out into a strange world where no one place had attraction for her above another, and where no heart pulsed faster at the thought of her approach.

But candor resented the latter reflection. She could not pretend to herself that she had forgotten Leo. Days and weeks passed after her last interview with him before the full meaning of all his words permeated her chilled heart. Then she realized how he at least had believed that he loved her. It all seemed a long, long time ago. Perhaps the repulse she had given him had turned his thoughts away from her, and by this time Miss Alden or some one else occupied the place he had offered to her. She did not regret what she had done. It all seemed the natural and logical sequence of the blow Miss Trowbridge had dealt her. Hardly a night passed even now that she did not in a waking hour pass

again through that scene at The Eyrie. It cast its shadow over each fair memory of her summer, and made all seem wrong, distorted, and in some sort a disgrace to her.

Her mental picture of Leo seemed always protesting against this state of things. What a charming comrade, what a kind friend, he had been! Sometimes her own heart took sides with him against her judgment, and then she wondered self-reproachfully if her love had been only stunned, not killed after all. One thing was certain, she did not wish to see him. If a motion of her hand could have brought him to her side, she would not have made it; and yet it was the remembrance of him that made it impossible for her to envy Susan her lot, much as she valued Phineas Thorne.

The latter came to her two days afterward and told her that the report of the money left by her father was true, and that she was the possessor of more than nine thousand dollars left clear after his debts were paid. After some talk as to the investment of the money, Thorne asked Irene if she had made any plans.

The girl put on a cheerful air as she replied, "I am going to the house in New York where we

boarded last. My winter clothes are all there. I may remain there a time. I do not quite know yet."

"Polly and I have been talking it over. We should be very glad to have you stay with us," said Thorne.

"I ought not to accept that offer," she replied, looking at him wistfully. "I may come back to Proctor by sheer force of attraction, for you are the best friends I have; but I cannot consent to become a member of your family. That would be too serious a venture."

"For you, or for us?" asked Miss Thorne, appearing from the next room, where she had been listening to the conversation. "I want you to understand, Irene, that this was my thought quite as much as Phineas's. If you must go to New York, why, go; but we want you to call this home, and always to make it your headquarters and to feel that you have a right here; the more time you spend here, the better we shall like it."

Irene looked at the speaker, and her breath came faster.

"We all have too much common sense to feign anything in a matter so serious as this," added Phineas. "We have been frank, and now you must

be equally so. Consult only your own inclinations, or no good will come of it."

"To have this for my home! To have a right here!" exclaimed Irene joyfully. "You must know that it is a blessed alternative to the lonely life I should lead elsewhere."

"Then we will shake hands on the new family arrangement," said Phineas, suiting the action to the word with the cordial smile Irene loved. Polly joyfully grasped the girl's other hand, and the compact was made.

That day Polly made Irene move her belongings into the room Susan had occupied, and the girl looked around it with the satisfied glow which pervades the feminine breast at the prospect of a permanent abiding-place. She felt ashamed of the faithless repining in which she had indulged of late. After all, she was neither friendless nor dependent. It was delightful for her to have Polly appear, from time to time, at her open door to remark on the arrangements she was making.

"Maybe you'll want to buy you a new set of furniture," suggested Miss Thorne on one of these flying visits. "This one is rather shabby, and no mistake."

"To think that I really might!" exclaimed Irene with childlike satisfaction.

"Why, of course," returned Polly. "I expect you'll make a bower of the place before you get through. Yours are fairy fingers, anyway. Won't it seem odd when you and I are left alone in the little house, Irene?"

Miss Thorne asked the question significantly, and sat down as she spoke. Irene saw she had something to impart.

"Is Mr. Thorne going away?" she asked, looking up from the bureau drawer she was filling.

"When he is married, yes. He intends to build, and I'm glad of it."

"And you will stay here?"

"Oh, yes," said Miss Polly with a toss of her head. "I shouldn't think of leaving the old place — except as I'm needed occasionally to tell Susan the difference between roast beef and mutton chops," she added with some impatience. "I told Phineas this wasn't the sort of house to bring his bride to, and he said that he had already determined to build, and was wondering how he could induce me to live anywhere else than here. I told him he couldn't, and he might as well give up that idea first as last; but that I could love him just as well a mile off as I could in the next room, since there was going to be some one around any way that he liked better than

he did me, and that his idea of building had my full and hearty approbation. Do you know, Irene, it may be very foolish, but I can't get it out of my mind the way Isabel Cox fought that blessed boy about his getting Susan, when he is a thousand times too good for the little chit!" she finished, her cheeks flushing.

"Perhaps that was the reason," observed Irene. "You know Mrs. Cox thought the match unsuitable, and so did I, and so do you."

Miss Thorne paused, staggered for the moment by this view of the case, but instantly she rallied. "No, *ma'am!* it was privations for Susan she dreaded. Privations with Phineas! You see she came here, saw the plain little house, saw me doing my own work, and she jumped at conclusions without remembering the copy-book where we both used to write, 'Appearances are deceitful.' Well, let Phineas go on and build his house, and I don't care how much plate glass and hard wood he puts into it. Let him do it. Then let Isabel Cox come and look out of the windows, — it's going to be on one of the prettiest lots on the lake shore, — and see if her daughter is suffering from as much poverty as she expected. Pshaw! Phineas Thorne could build more houses than Isabel Cox could pay rent for!"

Irene smiled at the defiant tone. Polly was so seldom defiant.

"How very nice for Susan!" she answered. "You can acquit her of mercenary motives, at all events. She would have been quite happy to have married your brother, old-fashioned house and all."

"H'm, yes," said Polly dryly. "I used to think Susan was wonderfully changed, and sensible, and docile, about many things, and now I see it all meant Phineas."

"That was very creditable to him and to her. If she grew more lovely under his influence, that is one of the surest signs that he is not any too good for her," replied Irene, laughing a little at her own assumption of wisdom. "Am I not right about that?"

"I don't know. Any worldly, frivolous girl would be likely to tone down and grow more sensible by living in the house with Phineas."

"But not every worldly, frivolous girl would have fallen in love with him. I shall always think it was fine in Susan to love him. You need not look surprised, Miss Polly. You know my appreciation of Mr. Thorne; but I know much better than you what the charm of Susan's life has been, and how devoted the feeling must be which induced her to give it all up. It seems she will not give up so much as she

expected to; but the willingness was there. Yes, I am quite in love with Susan myself, since she has proved herself so much more of a woman than I thought her."

By such fragmentary praise of Thorne's *fiancée*, spoken occasionally, did Irene woo and win his sister to more than passive resignation to his marriage. By degrees Miss Polly's interest was awakened and her enthusiasm warmed, until at last many loving messages found their way through the mails to Susan, who never suspected the inimical first thoughts of her future sister-in-law.

Phineas saw it all, and appreciated the service Irene rendered him. He wished he might do her as signal a favor, and he studied her in those days with more earnestness than might have been expected in a man so absorbed as he had become in his correspondence.

He discovered that Irene was thin, that she inclined to listlessness, and that she frequently roused herself with an effort in order to seem interested in whatever subject was under discussion.

He confided these symptoms to Susan, and asked her whether she supposed it likely that Irene was pining for her father; to which idea Miss Farley replied with fine scorn.

"It sounds," she added, "as though you might be describing Miss Susan Farley as she would have appeared by this time if you had *not* stepped on to the rear platform."

Phineas meditated and shook his head. "That would be too good luck for Leo; but," he smiled as he thought it, "incredible good fortune does come to a man now and then in this world."

CHAPTER XXV.

IN THE FIRELIGHT.

AFTER this Phineas was not at rest about Irene, even though he saw her enter with zest into Polly's interests.

Whether the need was of the nature of church work, such as preparing a box for the family of a home missionary, or whether it was sitting up with a sick neighbor, Irene was always a willing and able assistant. She had the strong impulse toward use which in every case led her to perceive the necessity and promptly to perform the task, whatever it was. In an astonishingly short time people discovered and appreciated her, and the once lonely, reserved girl found herself at last in active life, popular and beloved.

The walls of Thorne's new house were beginning to rise, and Irene often went with him to watch its progress.

It was a foregone conclusion in Proctor that Miss

Flanders was the woman who would occu y the house with him one of these days, and the idea was immensely pleasing to their friends. Even mothers of daughters who were approaching their thirties, whose desperate hope Phineas had been for years, were obliged to admit reluctantly that he would be blind not to love the beautiful and good girl whom his sister had welcomed beneath their roof. The story of Mr. Flanders' death and Irene's friendless condition had spread, and although, through the servants, some hint had gone abroad at the time of the odd manner in which the girl had left The Eyrie, her personal charm and her unostentatious, practical ability and helpfulness soon banished the slight curiosity felt in the days when she had been a stranger in their midst.

One autumn morning, as Irene and Phineas were driving home amid the red and gold maples from a visit of inspection to the "model cottage," as they called the new house, Phineas enlightened his companion as to this rumor, which had not yet reached her ears.

"I was congratulated yesterday on my engagement," he said.

"Ah, the murder is out, then!" she replied. "Of course we knew the house would waken people's

suspicions. It is just as well. Really, it has been something remarkable to keep such a secret so long here."

"But it seems it is generally believed that you are the lady."

A faint, surprised color crept over the girl's face. "It is odd that I never thought people might make that mistake," she said quietly, "for it is a very natural one. Well, I think the time has come to make the announcement, don't you?"

Phineas assented; so upon their arrival at home Irene told Polly what had happened, and advised her what to do. Polly agreed meekly, and immediately arrayed herself in her very best, and ordered Major to be harnessed for a prompt start after dinner.

"I will be your coachman," said Irene, as she arranged Miss Thorne's bonnet strings, gave the necessary touches to her shawl, and buttoned her gloves.

"It will only be necessary to go to a few places," remarked Polly dryly as they set forth. "I have only to select the right ones, and they will spread the news all over town and save me the trouble."

Irene drove according to her companion's direction, and stopped before a door which Polly indicated.

"If Mrs. Windsor is at home," remarked the latter

as she left the phaeton, "it isn't really necessary for me to go to another place. She puts the Proctor *Chronicle* in the shade as an advertising medium."

Miss Thorne ascended the steps and rang the bell. Mrs. Windsor was at home, and eagerly pleased to see her guest.

"You know your visits are uncommonly like the angels', Miss Polly, and correspondingly valued," she said. The visitor waited patiently while her hostess expatiated at length on the folly of buying a particular furnace for the church, when the product of another manufacturer was so far superior; then the voluble Mrs. Windsor herself opened the desired subject.

"What a handsome house your brother is building, Miss Polly! Isn't it rather too fine to hope to rent?"

"He doesn't wish to rent it," returned Polly quietly.

"Well, I don't believe he will sell it very easily. People that can afford to buy that sort of a house don't many of them want to come to Proctor. I know all about it, you see. My cousin saw the plans."

"He does not wish to sell it. He is going to live in it himself. He is going to be married."

"I want to know!" Mrs. Windsor's eager eyes

snapped. "To be perfectly frank, I had my suspicions, as a great many others have. Well, it is time Mr. Thorne was married; and as for Miss Flanders, why, she is getting to be almost as much of a favorite as he is. What a sweet girl she is, and how it must please you, Miss Polly! I think you are quite as much to be congratulated as he is, for it would just have broken your heart if any inferior woman had hoodwinked your brother."

"That would not be an easy matter," returned Polly with dignity; "but he is not engaged to Miss Flanders." The other raised her hands in an amazed gesture.

"Why — Miss Polly —" she ejaculated.

"He is engaged to Miss Farley, the young lady who visited us this summer," continued Miss Thorne, not anxious to prolong her errand, and growing very red-cheeked before the amazement in the other's face.

"Miss Farley! Why, you take my breath away. I never spoke with her, but she always seemed a very haughty sort of a girl. Why, why! to think Mr. Thorne has waited all these years to find his fate so! She is extremely pretty," continued Mrs. Windsor, recollecting herself; "and how are *you* pleased, Miss Polly?"

The small eyes seemed endeavoring to see into

the most secret recesses of Miss Thorne's soul, but Polly knew with whom she had to deal, and was well prepared. "I am extremely pleased, of course," she said quietly. "It was a great thing to become so thoroughly acquainted with the lady who is my brother's choice. I became very much attached to her before I knew that he was thinking of her. Her mother has been my friend for many years. It is a most pleasing arrangement for us all. Miss Farley and Miss Flanders were schoolmates, and that is an additional source of satisfaction, for our dear Irene is quite one of us, you know. She knew quite well what was going forward before she came to be with us." Polly's composed manner carried conviction with it. She left Mrs. Windsor with the comfortable sensation that her errand had been well performed, and rejoined Irene with a satisfied smile.

"They will all wish it was you, that is the worst of it," she said, as they drove on to the next destination.

Here too the lady was at home, and Miss Thorne launched her thunderbolt with telling effect. This was one of the houses where dwelt the marriageable daughters referred to, and the mother took the news exceedingly ill. She had been resigned to Irene's getting the prize; but as for his falling to the lot of

that stylish, scornful girl, whose acquaintance no one had succeeded in making, although she had lived months in the town, that was unbearable. The wronged mother could scarcely conceal her ire until Polly was out of the house.

"Oh, this is getting tiresome," exclaimed Miss Thorne. "No one knows Susan, and of course no one likes her. I really need not go to another house, for those two women will make it known to everybody."

"It would be better to do it thoroughly," said Irene firmly. "Where next, Miss Polly?"

The latter sighed and gave the desired direction. It seemed as though the feminine population were staying at home to hear Miss Polly's news, for here again she was ushered into the house, and Irene waited so long for her return that she began to wonder whether at last the fact of the engagement had been received with such sympathy that Miss Thorne was staying to bask in the sunshine of approval, or whether it had finally given such extreme umbrage that she was being detained by physical injuries.

After what seemed a very long time, Miss Thorne came out to the carriage looking much excited.

"We will go directly home, Irene," she said. "I

won't make any more calls to-day;" then, as Major willingly took the desired direction, she continued, "I have just learned that Miss Trowbridge is very ill alone there at the Brunswick. She may be on her death-bed now. If she does die, it will be Leo Graham that has killed her. It seems he hasn't been near her, and has only written to her a few times since he left Proctor. I did not think the boy could be so hard-hearted. He knows that he is the only interest she has in life. Oh, poor Emma!" Polly's eyes moistened. She forgot her companion's connection with the case. Her thoughts were busy with the events of long years before Irene was born, during which she and Miss Trowbridge had been girls together.

The pallor and gravity of Irene's face revealed how thin it had become. "Who do you suppose takes care of her?" she asked coldly.

"A trained nurse, without doubt."

"And they are invaluable," said the girl with a relieved breath.

"Oh, yes, so far as duty goes, but God grant that some one who loves me may be near me in my last days."

"I do not love her," thought Irene, "it would be useless for me to be there."

Of course Polly's one idea was to consult with Phineas; but he was a little late that afternoon, and she and Irene were at the table, when he came in.

"Phineas, Emma Trowbridge is very sick indeed," exclaimed his sister as soon as she saw him. "Have you heard anything about it?"

"No, I have not," he replied, looking concerned.

"But I wonder why you haven't. That puzzles me."

"She would not be likely to need me unless she wished to change her will," replied Phineas, observing Irene's troubled countenance.

"Well, my bag is all packed, so I can go on the 8.30 if you think I had better. It does seem heartless for every one to desert her. Irene can go to one of the neighbors, and you can take your meals at the hotel till I get back."

"I would not go without more certain information," said Phineas. "We can telegraph her this evening."

"I am afraid she is too far gone to know anything about telegrams," replied Polly mournfully. "Mrs. Sedgwick had it direct from a friend of hers, who lives at the same hotel, that Emma was very sick, and that Leo hadn't been near her, and almost never wrote to her."

"Then don't be alarmed, Polly," replied Thorne. "The latter part of your information is false, so probably the first is an exaggeration."

"Why, do tell me what you know," said his sister eagerly.

"Only that Leo has written his aunt every week since he went away. That is all," added Phineas, seeing his sister's eager intention to follow up her questioning.

The latter understood that she was to ask no more. "I am very glad to know it," she returned; "I did not like to think so badly of Leo."

"I will telegraph Miss Trowbridge in your name this evening, asking her if she is ill and if she wants you," said Phineas; then, out of consideration for Irene, he turned the conversation and began speaking of the new house, and this led finally to his sister giving him a comical version of the reception which the true story of his engagement had met in the town.

As soon as they arose from the table Thorne left the house to go to the telegraph office.

He was absent some time, and when he returned Polly was alone in the dining-room. He entered by the back door, and, had his sister been as observant as usual, she would have noted that his face was flushed and excited; but Polly was herself agitated.

"Oh, Phineas," she began in a stage whisper, "why didn't you give me the wink and not let me talk so much about Emma before Irene? I was so anxious for fear she might be dying all alone there, I entirely forgot that poor child's experiences, and I declare I shouldn't know the girl, she's so white and low-spirited. I did apologize to her in an awkward kind of way; but she only said there was no reason why I should consider her. What do you suppose is the matter? Did I scold too much about Leo, or did I pity Emma so much that I made Irene feel as if I blamed her for the trouble that's come between them?"

Thorne's eyes were bright and he looked very serious. "I don't know, little sister. What do you want me to do, talk with her?"

"Yes — no — yes. I don't know."

"Neither do I."

"Dear me, she looks dreadfully!" said Polly, perplexed and tearful.

"Well, you do not seem to have any more idea what to do than I have," he returned doubtfully.

"Of course I haven't. You always help everybody, Phineas. Do help her." Polly gave him a little push toward the parlor as she spoke.

Phineas smiled and frowned, and his cheeks were flushed. "Couldn't you give me a little cherry brandy to help me go through with it?" he asked.

Polly looked at him reproachfully. It was so unlike Phineas to be flippant when he knew that any heart was aching. "Don't you go! You are not in the right mood," she said, holding him back now.

"I must, — that's the worst of it," he said ruefully.

"Why?" she asked wonderingly.

He looked cautiously toward the closed door of the parlor, then whispered something in his sister's ear.

"No such thing, Phineas Thorne!" she exclaimed.

"Softly, softly, my dear!" then he whispered to her once more, while her eyes grew round and rounder.

"Emma at The Eyrie!" she ejaculated, "and Le —"

"Hush, hush! Miss Trowbridge has had the right medicine to revive her. Now you see what I have to do whether I like it or not. Wish me well, Polly, and do be prudent or you will spoil everything."

He opened the door of the parlor and went in. Irene was sitting there before a glowing bed of coals, her hands occupied with some fancy work. The ruddy light of the fire lent her face a brightness as

she knitted. It occurred to Phineas that a weaker girl would have shut herself up in her own room, there to bemoan her unhappiness, from whatever cause it arose; but Irene would realize that such a course would bring awkwardness and discomfort to others, and she would be sure to deny herself the indulgence.

"I am glad you have come," she said. "I had no intention of monopolizing this beautiful fire."

"Thank you. The evening is decidedly frosty," returned Phineas, sitting down and extending his hands to the blaze. "I wanted to see you alone a few minutes if an opportunity like this offered," he continued. "I want to talk with you on a subject which may be vital, or indifferent, to you. If I knew which was the fact, I could proceed with less awkwardness."

He stopped and looked at her deliberately. Her hands trembled on the needles that flashed in the firelight, and he saw it.

"You are not looking well. I fear Proctor does not agree with you."

She looked at him imploringly. "I am quite well," she said. "Please do not talk about me."

"Irene," said Thorne earnestly, "I regard you with the same respect, the same interest, and something of the same affection, if you will let me say so, that

I feel for my sister. Won't you trust me to say only what I think is necessary and right to be said? I may be on the wrong track, and your changed looks may not be due to the anxiety which I fear is working in you; but if I am right you will be the better for the annoyance that I am subjecting you to now."

Irene dropped her work and returned his look sadly. "Go on," she said briefly. "I trust you more than I do myself."

Thorne drew a letter from his pocket. "I received this a week ago from Miss Trowbridge, and I want to read it to you."

Irene put up a hand as though to stop him.

"I want to read it to you," he repeated. "May I?"

She dropped her hand, and a slight frown contracted her brow. "You do not know," she said coldly.

"No, you never told me. Still, 'to err is human; to forgive, divine.'"

"I do forgive. I only ask not to hear about her, not to be brought into contact even with her letters."

"That is not forgiveness, Irene; did you really think it was? I would like to have you listen to this, at any rate," and he proceeded to read the letter aloud.

"My Dear Phineas:

"My head is feeling very badly to-day. I think I may be going to be ill, and if I were to be it would be well for you, as my lawyer, to have a few words from me respecting my desire that my nephew should have the whole of my property. In the suffering I have endured in the past months, which seem to me like years, my mind has so often dwelt on the desperate thought of disinheriting him, in return for his estrangement from me, that I have even gone so far as to hint to one or two that certain charities would be the gainers by my demise; and should I be delirious, I might talk about it and thus confirm a false impression. No, indeed; as the thought of death comes to me as an actuality, I am eager that Leo should have all, — all. Time would then be more likely to heal the breach between us, and his old boyish love for me might return. Oh, Phineas, I am such a lonely, wretched woman. Life has lost all its interest and sweetness. To be sure, Leo's letter comes every week; but such a letter! Kind, polite, full of cheerful news as to his business success, but without one line of that which was my daily food, and for which my heart is starving. Every week I realize more clearly how bound up he had grown to be in that cold girl who cast him off.

It is my fatal misfortune that I said and did that which he must constantly remember as the possible cause of his losing her; but do you think it could truly have been so? Had she loved him, would her pride be strong enough to lead her to ruin three lives? No, rather must I believe the wonderful fact that she did not love him; and what claim have I upon her that should make her willing to try to restore harmony between Leo and me? I treated her very badly. She did nothing whatever to deserve it. There is no humiliation I would not suffer to obtain her help in undoing the past; but I fear there is no hope. The suffering I endure is slowly killing me. I am not clever or accomplished. I have no resources. I had only Leo, and I have lost him. I am willing to die, and indeed I feel very ill. So good-by, Phineas. You have been a kind friend to me in my trouble, and I thank you. You say you are going to marry Miss Farley. Forgive me that in my self-absorption I did not speak of it before. I offer my congratulations to you both, and hope you will be as happy as you deserve.

"Your sincere friend,

"Emma Trowbridge."

Phineas read this letter deliberately and clearly.

When he looked up, Irene's hand was pressed against her heart, and her eyes were wet.

"I will do whatever you tell me," she said quickly.

"What does your heart dictate?"

"That I should go to her at once. I never have realized how she suffered. I have no idea what I should say to her, but that would come. I did not know that Leo had left her. I did not know that he was in business."

"It is he who has arranged your affairs for you; who has made all the inquiries and done all the work," replied Phineas quietly, mercilessly gazing into her crimsoning face and into the depths of her eyes.

She made no answer, and he went on.

"He has not been paid yet. Shall I tell you what he asks? He wants permission to come here and see you. That is all."

"He ought to go to his aunt first." Irene's trembling was visible. "He has been very kind to me, considering that I — but he should go to his aunt first and forgive her."

"He has been there. I heard from him to-night at the telegraph office, and Miss Trowbridge is by no means dangerously ill." Phineas paused. "Irene," he said, and she had to meet his honest,

direct look. "You remember that you said Susan's and my story might have ended wrong through some misunderstanding. Be very, very sure that no false pride ruins your romance, which might be so complete and full. Leo Graham is a noble young fellow, and most deserving of all you can give him. Since he left Proctor he has written me regularly, making no secret of the fact that whatever word he could obtain concerning you was the solace of his hard-working life. He is anxious for permission to see you on any terms; but I doubt, Irene, if it be well for you to consent unless you feel that there is some hope for him. I feel sure that, one way or the other, that question is already decided in your mind. Now, — can he come?"

Irene clasped her hands and dropped them in her lap with a restful gesture. "Yes," she said, with a long, sighing breath.

Phineas rose from his chair with a quick movement. "I hear the messenger boy," he said. "Now we shall learn the latest news from Miss Trowbridge."

He left the room, and Irene sat motionless in the firelight. Every pulse was beating beneath her quiet exterior. Could it be possible that she had a right to this great happiness, the strength of which possessed her whole being? It seemed to her she

must be still, still, to sustain it. She had not realized her own self-repression until the weight was lifted. Now the flood of hope, of brightness, frightened her.

The door opened. She was, of course, interested to hear the latest bulletin from the Brunswick, but she wished ardently that Phineas had left her alone for five minutes longer.

He did not speak, and she suddenly realized it and looked up.

It was Leo who stood there, eager, repressed, to her eyes royally handsome in the radiant firelight.

She sprang to her feet with a start and looked at him, a great pulse beating in her throat. She feared him, her good comrade, in that moment.

"You were kind to let me come," he said, studying her with anxious eyes that strove to discover on what grounds she had admitted him. "What does it mean, Irene? Is it — is it friendship still?"

He advanced, and she instinctively withdrew a step.

"Yes — yes," she said, a beautiful color flooding her pale face.

He paused, continuing to study her, afraid to read the language of her eyes aright.

"Does your friendliness show itself by refusing to

shake hands with me? You used not, — not to be afraid of me, Irene."

She looked at him, and saw the evidence of disappointment and long struggle in his grave face. All the momentary dread was forgotten. Neither he nor she knew how it happened that all at once she was in his arms.

"I used not to love you," she answered, and Leo, in his dizzying revulsion of feeling, could not speak for the joy that filled him; but he knew, as he pressed his lips to hers, that the chilled bud had been warmed back to life, and had bloomed for him an everlasting flower, in a supremacy of color and light.

CONCLUSION.

LATE one evening in the following July, a party who had for hours been enjoying the coolness of the lake breezes were seated together in the bow of Graham's launch as the little boat glided swiftly through the moonlight.

There was Leo himself and his wife. There was Phineas and Susan, for the new house had its master and mistress now; and there was Mrs. Cox, who had accepted the invitation to come and look out of the windows of her daughter's beautiful home. Polly, mollified by her sincere admiration, was now beside her, and close to Irene sat Miss Trowbridge, her eyes serene under her silver hair.

"I do feel," said Polly quietly to her neighbor, "that I ought to go in. My husband won't understand my staying so long. I am sorry he couldn't come to-night."

Mrs. Cox looked at her curiously. "Of all the changes, your marriage seems strangest to me, Polly,

because I did not know that you — that there was anybody."

Polly laughed cheerily. "Mr. Elder always held on to his idea through thick and thin," she said, "and as soon as he heard that Phineas was going to leave me he began to argue how lonely I'd be. Well, I knew *he* was lonely, boarding around as he has so many years, and I never did believe his mending was half attended to; so when Irene got married, and I did seem to be forlorn and sort of useless, and he kept teasing so, I finally said yes. He's the kindest soul that ever lived, and we are as happy in our way as the young folks."

Mrs. Cox still looked curiously and rather enviously at the speaker. "You needn't talk about young folks," she said. "I believe the fountain of eternal youth is springing somewhere in Proctor, and I hope Susan will find it."

"I hear you, mamma," said the latter dreamily, leaning her cheek against her husband's knee, while his hand rested on her hair. "Phineas knows where it is. He is teaching me the way to it."

Thorne dropped his hand to her shoulder and drew her closer to him. "We are near our landing now, Leo," he said. "I think, as it is almost midnight, we had better go in."

As the launch approached the platform Polly looked proudly at the graceful outlines of her brother's house, appreciative of its effect upon Mrs. Cox; but in a moment another figure, not graceful, rather tall and angular, met her eyes.

"There is the poor deacon," she cried. "I expect he was thinking he'd have to drag the lake for me;" and with a hurried "good-night" she was the first to leave the boat, and the others could see her trotting away beside her anxious lord.

Irene smiled. "She is the very person to make that good, shy man perfectly happy, and she does it, excepting when we run away with her as we did this evening."

More good-nights were exchanged, and the launch steamed on toward The Eyrie.

"Has your headache disappeared, Aunt Emma," asked Irene.

Miss Trowbridge looked at her affectionately. "Entirely, dear child. One forgets the heat of the day out here."

Only in her gray hair and in a certain loss of imperiousness did Miss Trowbridge show that she had passed through a crucial experience; but never after that evening, during which Irene, in the freshness of her joy, came with Leo to The Eyrie to hasten the

renewal of perfect confidence between her lover and his aunt, did the latter lose the element of gratitude which mingled with a new-born, intense love for the girl who seemed to her in that critical hour like an angel bringing her all for which she had prayed.

The little boat sped on beneath moonlight and starlight. Irene, grown very beautiful in her peace and happiness, leaned back against the arm her husband slipped around her.

Miss Trowbridge feasted her eyes on the picture they made, and love and joy so swelled her heart that tears filled her eyes.

"I have two beautiful children," she thought, "and they love me. Thank God!"

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